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# Consumer-Brand Engagement: Cultural and Moral Manifestations

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# Consumer-Brand Engagement: Cultural and Moral Manifestations

Anna Jansson Vredevelde, Ph.D.

University of Connecticut, 2015

This dissertation explores consumer-brand engagement; that is, consumers' instrumental and goal directed use of brands. Specifically, this dissertation consists of two essays that examine how consumers purposefully engage with brands. In the first essay, I use depth interviews with border crossers to explore how they, as temporary residents of the U.S., rely on brands to construct their desired cultural experiences. In particular, I investigate how different experiential motives, such as a desire for cultural discovery or a unique cultural experience, influence how border crossers engage with brands within a temporary cultural context. My findings show that the border crossers' experiential motives are the driving force behind their degree of participation in cultural activities, their use of brands as props in the experience construction, and their reliance on culturally anchored brand meanings to assess the instrumentality of a given brand to the experience construction. In the second essay, I explore how consumers purposefully and intentionally engage with brands in pursuit of consumption legitimacy. Specifically, by relying on both qualitative and quantitative analysis of posts from an online discussion forum dedicated to luxury handbag brands, I examine how luxury brand consumers mobilize to undermine the moral status of counterfeit consumers. My findings show that luxury brand consumers collectively frame counterfeit users and counterfeit consumption to attain legitimacy for their ownership of luxury brands. Taken together, these two dissertation essays contribute our understanding of consumer-brand engagement by showcasing how consumers use brands as means to realize their experiential and moral motives.

Consumer-Brand Engagement: Cultural and Moral Manifestations

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Connecticut

2015

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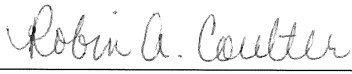
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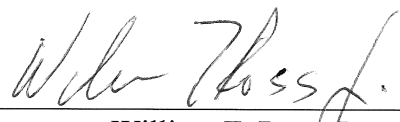
Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation


Consumer-Brand Engagement: Cultural and Moral Manifestations

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Brands have been of particular interest to consumer behavior scholars over the past two decades. Multiple streams of research have documented how consumers use brands as extensions of self (Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005), as relationship partners (Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998), and as identity signals (Berger and Heath 2007; Levy 1959; Schau and Gilly 2003; Solomon 1983). Most of this research focuses on consumers' connections, relationships, or symbolic usage of specific brands, often drawing upon psychological theories related to self-schema (Higgins 1987; Markus 1977) and sociological theories of self-expression (Blumer 1986; Goffman 1959; Mead 1913). Although previous research have emphasized that consumers use brands as means to an end, rather than as an end in itself (Fournier 1998), surprisingly little research exists on how consumers rely on brands to achieve specific self-relevant goals. The overarching purpose of this dissertation is to address this gap in previous research by exploring consumer-brand engagement; that is, consumers' instrumental and goal directed use of brands.

Previous research suggests that consumer-brand engagement has four characteristics. First, consumer-brand engagement is inherently motivational because it reflects the consumer's pursuit of specific desired outcomes (Hollebeek 2011a). Second, consumer-brand engagement involves "behavioral manifestations" (van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 254) defined in terms of specific practices or activities in brand interactions (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009; Warde 2005) that contribute to the realization of a goal. Hence, consumer-brand engagement goes beyond involvement with branded products (Coulter, Price, and Feick 2003) by highlighting the importance of how the consumer interacts with brands (Brodie et al. 2013). Third, consumer-brand engagement is context dependent because consumers may engage in different brand-

related practices across different sociocultural contexts (Bengtsson, Bardhi, and Venkatraman 2010; Hollebeek 2011a). Fourth and relatedly, in contrast to brand attitude and brand attachment which reflect enduring dimensions of the consumers' brand evaluations, consumer-brand engagement is not brand-specific because the instrumental value of a given brand to goal realization may vary across time and place (Hollebeek 2011a, 2011b; Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg 2009). Consumer-brand engagement also differs from brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantello 2009) because the experiential value of a brand is not only dependent on the attributes of the brand (i.e., affective, cognitive, behavioral, sensory), but also on the brand's perceived instrumentality to realize specific desired outcomes. Hence, brand experience is responsive, whereas consumer-brand engagement is motivational (Hollebeek 2011b). Taken together, these characteristics suggest that studying consumer-brand engagement can contribute significantly to our understanding of brands as embedded in the consumer's "lived experience," and that brands are purposefully "marshaled in pursuit of a full range of goal-related tasks" (Fournier 1998, p. 367).

In this dissertation, I explore consumer-brand engagement in two essays. In the first essay, I examine how border crossers rely on brands to construct their desired cultural experiences. Specifically, I examine how different experiential motives, such as a desire for cultural discovery or a unique cultural experience, influence how border crossers engage with brands within a temporary cultural context. In the second essay, I explore how consumers purposefully and intentionally engage with brands in pursuit of consumption legitimacy. In particular, I study how luxury brand consumers collectively frame counterfeit users and counterfeit consumption to attain legitimacy for their ownership of luxury brands. Overall, these two essays contribute to research on consumer-brand engagement by showcasing how consumers

use brands as means to realize their experiential and moral motives. In the next two sections, I provide a more detailed overview of each essay.

## **Cultural Brand Engagement: The Roles of Brands in the Construction of Cultural Experiences (Overview Essay 1)**

Essay 1 explores cultural brand engagement; that is, how border crossers engage with brands within a new cultural space to create cultural experiences. Previous research documents that brand meanings may differ across cultures (Cayla and Arnould 2008; Dong and Tian 2010) and that such differences are likely to be recognized by border crossers, such as expatriates, tourists, and immigrants (Bengtsson et al. 2010). Consequently, most consumer research on border crossers has studied how these consumers react to such differences in light of cultural identity negotiation (Arnett 2012; Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Peñaloza 1994). In contrast, my research focuses on how border crossers actively and purposefully choose brands that can help them construct their desired cultural experiences in line with specific experiential motives. Specifically, by examining border crossers' emic perspectives of cultural exploration, I capture differences in cultural brand engagement manifestations as a consequence of differences in (1) the border crosser's desired cultural experience, (2) the nature of the border crosser's participation in cultural activities, and (3) the border crosser's assessment and reliance of culturally anchored brand meanings.

My findings highlight the importance of considering the border crosser's desired cultural experience as a driving force behind the degree of participation in cultural activities and the use of brands as props in the experience construction. For border crossers who desire the realization of a specific and pre-determined cultural experience (often inspired by home culture media),

participation in cultural activities is primarily focused on dramatically enacting their experience according to expectations by using brands that are presumed to have cultural significance. In contrast, for border crossers who desire an exciting cultural experience that differs from what can be experienced in the home culture, participation in cultural activities is superficial and selective, and brands are seen as vessels for novelty exploration. Finally, for border crossers who desire cultural discovery, full cultural immersion is necessary and, as a consequence, these border crossers search for brands that can facilitate cultural insider status. Overall, these findings contribute to our understanding of consumer-brand engagement by showcasing the relationships between experiential motives, participation in cultural activities, purposeful use of brands within an unfamiliar cultural context, and brand usage meanings.

### **Moral Brand Engagement: Collective Moral Framing of Counterfeit Consumption by Luxury Brand Consumers (Overview Essay 2)**

Essay 2 explores moral brand engagement, defined as consumers' purposeful interactions with brands in pursuit of consumption legitimacy. Specifically, I examine the moral brand engagement practices of luxury brand consumers who have experienced loss of moral status due to the normalization of counterfeit consumption. Interestingly, counterfeit consumption is often considered to be a viable, affordable, and an even more "moral" alternative to traditional luxury brand consumption (La Ferla 2007; Ramirez 2006) because luxury brands have more negative associations related to "wasteful" spending and ostentatious exhibition of wealth. The coexistence of the genuine brand and its counterfeit counterpart creates an interesting context for exploring moral brand engagement because it captures how luxury brand consumers navigate the complex sphere of moral brand meanings to purposefully undermine the moral status of

counterfeit consumers. Hence, this essay builds upon research on “moralistic identity work” (Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010, p. 1017) by examining how consumers collectively frame alternative consumption forms to attain legitimacy for their own consumption. Specifically, by relying on both qualitative and quantitative analyses of posts from an online discussion forum dedicated to luxury handbag brands, I examine how luxury brand consumers collectively mobilize to undermine the legitimacy of counterfeit consumption. My findings showcase that forum posters engage in collective framing of counterfeit consumption as a morally reprobate consumption practice. Thus, this second essay contributes to our understanding of consumer-brand engagement by highlighting how consumers collectively imbue brand consumption practices with moral meanings.



## CHAPTER 2: ESSAY 1

### CULTURAL BRAND ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLES OF BRANDS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

“Some of them I think are good brands but, for the most part, I just think I’m using the experiences with [the brands]... I didn’t come over here to permanently change my shopping habits or permanently change where I live. I was always very aware that I was coming over for a year and I’d get to experience those brands and get the American experience.”

*(Sarah, age 20, exchange student from the United Kingdom)*

Brands are key communicative devices in a global world, particularly as border crossers including tourists, immigrants, and expatriates, encounter differences in brand meanings across cultures. Multiple streams of work have enlightened our broad understanding of brands and their cultural meanings. For example, research documents that consumers, to varying degrees, include brands in their daily lives and discourses (Coulter et al. 2003; Fournier 1998; Sprott, et al. 2009) and that a consumer’s assessment of a given brand is dependent on its cultural origin (Bengtsson et al. 2010; Cayla and Eckhardt 2008; Dong and Tian 2010; Thompson and Arsel 2004), especially in light of cultural identity negotiation (Arnett 2002; Askegaard et al. 2005; Mehta and Belk 1991; Peñaloza 1994). Although this previous work provides a nuanced understanding of how consumers react to and negotiate cultural brand meaning differences, it provides little insights into how consumers purposefully and proactively use brands as part of experiencing a new culture. As Sarah’s verbatim illustrates, border crossers, such as international students, may use brands as props in the construction of desired cultural experiences, relying on brands as instruments to realize specific and articulated experiential motives related to, for example, the attainment of an “American experience.”

In this dissertation essay, I explore and offer a theory of *cultural brand engagement*; that is, how border crossers engage with brands within a new cultural space to create culturally meaningful experiences. I build on previous conceptualizations of brand engagement as consumers' instrumental and goal-directed use of brands through "cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions" (Brodie et al. 2013; Hollebeek 2011a, p. 790), and argue that border crossers are goal-directed in their use of brands when constructing their cultural experiences. I contend that cultural brand engagement involves the interplay among experiential goals, participation in cultural activities, and the interpretation of culturally anchored brand meanings (i.e., culturally contextualized semiotic meanings). In particular, I argue for a conceptualization of the border crosser as an active producer of the cultural experience (Deighton 1992; Holt 1995) and for a view of brands as performance props in the construction of the desired cultural experience (Celsi et al. 1993; Goffman 1959). Hence, cultural brand engagement captures (1) the border crosser's desired experience as reflected in cultural experiential motives, (2) the border crosser's reflection of how brands can be used as a means to realize this desired cultural experience, and (3) the resulting behavioral manifestations of the border crosser's instrumental use of brands as props in the construction of the desired cultural experience.

Specifically, in this research I explore the experiential motives of international students who enter the unfamiliar field of an "American college." The American college context, as a microcosm within the broader American culture, carries a variety of unique cultural frames related to both "America" and "American college," respectively (Moffatt 1991), and therefore provides an opportunity to examine how consumers use brands when constructing a desired cultural experience. Previous consumer research on cultural exploration primarily has focused on

how border crossers, such as immigrants, expatriates, and global nomads, navigate the new cultural consumption context as a consequence of cultural identity negotiation (Arnett 2002; Askegaard et al. 2005; Mehta and Belk 1991; Peñaloza 1994). However and importantly, border crossers are also active producers of their experiences, participating in culturally anchored activities that align with unique identity goals, such as career advancement and academic achievement (Furnham and Bochner 1986; Hannerz 1990; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). The American college context with its rich array of sociocultural activities (e.g., fraternity parties, football games, dating, classes) and identity referents (e.g., hipsters, jocks, nerds, sorority girls) provides an opportunity to explore how border crossers rely on what is familiar and unfamiliar about the cultural environment by using brands to construct their desired cultural experiences.

My research makes significant contributions to broadening of perspectives of the instrumental use of brands in experience construction. First, by focusing on how border crossers use brands as part of their experience construction, I further elucidate how brands are “marshaled in pursuit of a full range of goal-related tasks” (Fournier 1998, p. 367). Specifically, I show that consumers’ actively consider the meanings of brands and engage brands to help them realize their experiential motives. Hence, my research highlights the importance of considering consumers’ emic perspectives of how brands facilitate the realization of unique motives related to a cultural experience. Second and relatedly, in line with the view of brands as props in experience construction, I show that a brand’s instrumental value to constructing the desired cultural experience is dependent on both the brand’s usage meanings within the unfamiliar cultural context and within the familiar “home” culture. In particular, in their assessment of how instrumental a brand is to the construction of a desired cultural experience, I find that border crossers strive to find a match between behavioral experiential scripts (i.e., how the experience

can and should be constructed) and brand meanings related to actual or imagined usage. Finally, this research contributes to our understanding of cultural exploration by offering a more nuanced view of border crossers and the extent to which they are proactive agents who actively embrace the notion of “being a fish out of water” and rely on brands to align opportunities for cultural exploration with specific self-relevant experiential motives.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Constructing Desired Cultural Experiences**

Cultural experiences are embedded in biographical life narratives where future experiences are integrated with past experiences to provide a framework for meaningful self-expression (Giddens 1991). Cultural experiences are particularly suited for self-discovery voyages because they are so naturally embedded in a juxtaposition of the familiar and the unfamiliar (Belk 1997; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). Indeed, the acculturation literature documents consumer identities evolve as a consequence of the nature of the border crossing and that border crossers often differ in terms of how they use host culture products as part of their cultural exploration and cultural adjustment (Askegaard et al. 2005; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 1994). In particular, border crossers may vary in the degree to which they actively search for cultural authenticity and the degree to which they accept the obviously fabricated as identity relevant. At one end of the spectrum of border crossers are the tourists who explore the new culture through sightseeing and who “often expect fakery and appreciate when it is well done” (Lindholm 2008, p. 43). At the other end are the cosmopolitan border crossers who pursue activities that capture cultural diversity, often motivated by the idea that “the authentic culture is

just down the road being traveled” (Thompson and Tambyah 1999, p. 237). In between these two polar extremes, cultural exploration may take many forms, often embedded in more general (non-culture specific) life goals, such as academic success for international students and career advancement for expatriates (Furnham and Bochner 1986). Hence, although border crossers may share a desire for cultural experiences as part of being in an unfamiliar cultural space, the specific experiential motives vary as a consequence of the nature (e.g., duration, context, purpose, identity relevance) of the border crossing.

Consistent with these views of cultural experiences as identity relevant and inherently motivational, border crossers invest time and effort in constructing experiences in line with specific and articulated experiential motives. In this regard, the border crosser becomes an active producer of the experience, exerting some control over its outcomes, and often attempting to align experiential motives with what is actually experienced (Holt 1995). This construction of the experience often involves dramatic enactments (Grove and Fisk 1992; Mosio and Arnould 2005) where the setting (i.e., context of the experience) and the experiential motives influence what performance role the border crosser takes on as part of constructing the experience. According to Goffman (1959), dramatic realization involves a “frontstage” which includes the setting (e.g., props, décor) and the personal front which is a combination of the performer’s appearance and manner. Further, each performance involves a “backstage” where props and repertoires of acts and roles can be stored and where “illusions and impressions are openly constructed” (Goffman 1959, p. 112). For instance, the border crosser may become a frontstage participant in the experiential performance, observing and reflecting, without active involvement in the actual orchestration of the cultural experience. In contrast, the border crosser may strive to become an active participant in the dramatic enactment of experiential activities, thus fully involved in the

backstage of the performance where “illusions and impressions are openly constructed” (Goffman 1959, p. 30). For example, the cosmopolitan border crosser may seek full cultural immersion and “sneak backstage rather than be confined to the frontstage areas” (Hannerz 1990, p. 241-242), whereas others may seek participation in cultural activities more superficially, targeting access to specific activities, but not necessarily getting to know the locals (Lindholm 2008). Hence, construction of a cultural experience is directly anchored in the border crosser’s desire to participate in cultural activities and engage with cultural locals.

### **Brands as Props in Constructing the Desired Cultural Experience**

Brands are part of consumers’ identity narratives (Fournier 1998), and consumers rely on brands to construct and signal their identities (Berger and Heath 2007; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Solomon 1983). Because brands carry specific cultural meanings that can signal cultural belongingness (Bengtsson et al. 2010; Cayla and Eckhardt 2008; Dong and Tian 2010), they are important artifacts that may enable cultural outsiders to more effectively and convincingly “perform” in accordance with their new cultural environment. Thus, similar to the families including Ocean Spray cranberry sauce as part of their Thanksgiving consumption ritual (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991) and the skydiver who relies on equipment to realize the skydiving experiences (Celsi et al. 1993), border crossers may use brands as “props” in their cultural experience construction, actively assessing the instrumental value of specific brands to the realization of a desired cultural experience.

Previous research documents that brands have different usage functions which could influence how instrumental they are to the construction of experiences. For example, brands may serve an important symbolic function by allowing the consumer to convincingly assemble

dramatic fronts to convey specific impressions to self and others (Aaker 1999; Berger and Heath 2007; Schau and Gilly 2003; Solomon 1983). Brands can infuse the dramatic performance with “signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure” (Goffman 1959, p. 30). Thus, brands become props that not only enable precision in impression management, but also create targeted dramatic expression that is convincing to a specific audience, such as cultural locals. Moreover, previous research documents that brands make significant contributions to the experiential outcomes of orchestrated performances (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Wallendorf and Arnold 1991), such that a brand’s attributes (e.g., design, packaging; slogans) may evoke specific experiential sensations and behaviors (Bellizzi and Hite 1992; Fournier, Solomon, and Englis 2008; Keller 1987) that “constitute the major source of subjective, internal consumer responses” (Brakus et al. 2009, p. 53). In the construction of cultural experiences, such experiential outcomes should contribute to the cultural resonance of the performance, thereby enriching the experience (Fournier et al. 2008; Moisio and Arnould 2005).

Importantly, the instrumental value of a given brand to realizing specific cultural experience motives is dependent on *how* the brand can be used as part of constructing the cultural experience. Thus, although the border crosser may use brands for symbolic expression or experiential outcomes, the border crosser inevitably has to assess the viability of a brand as a prop in the construction of the experience and draw upon its various meanings when constructing the cultural experience in line with experiential motives.

## METHOD

In this essay, I explore how border crossers use brands to construct desired cultural experiences by relying on an interpretive research approach. Specifically, my research focuses on the experiential motives of international students who enter the unfamiliar cultural space of an “American college.” As noted, the American college context is particularly interesting because it includes both cultural “American” meanings and specific sociocultural activities that shape the experience of being enrolled in an American college (Moffatt 1991). In the interest of capturing a wide range of experiential motives, I purposefully recruited international students from countries with different cultural, political, and economic environments, including China, France, India, Iran, Ireland, Taiwan, Turkey, and United Kingdom (see Table 1 for an overview of informants). An all-female sample was selected to focus on cultural (vs. gendered) differences in experience motives and experience construction. Specifically, the sample included 16 females, aged 20 to 30, who had resided in the United States from three months to three years prior to the first interview. At the time of their interviews, individual informant’s estimated stay in the U.S. ranged from eight months to five years.

With an objective to capture informants’ emic perspectives (Olsen 2002; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991) of cultural exploration and brand use in culturally-bound experiences, I conducted two semi-structured interviews, three to four months apart, with each informant (McCracken 1988). The first interview included questions pertaining to experiential motives, including interpretations and expectations of what it means to experience American college life, as well as questions regarding home culture background, and similarities and differences in consumption behavior and brand preferences between home and the U.S. Prior to the second



interview, informants completed a short questionnaire asking them to list and define key image associations related to global and American brands that they were familiar with. The second interview built upon the first interview and included questions related to cultural symbolism and authenticity, along with probes related to brand usage, brand meanings, and brand relationships broadly and in the context of their American college experience. The first and second interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes; all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (Lincoln and Guba 1985; McCracken 1988).

Each transcript was analyzed following Strauss and Corbin's (1990) procedures for open and axial coding. Important themes were uncovered by using an iterative process (Spiggle 1994), moving back-and-forth between informants and across the entire data set to uncover specific categories, concepts, and contextual influences which were subsequently compared to extant theory. Specific aspects of brand use and brand meaning interpretation were coded and compared both within informant and across informants to capture different behavioral manifestations of brand engagement and the relationship between experiential motives and emic perspectives of cultural exploration and experience construction.

## **MANIFESTATIONS OF CULTURAL BRAND ENGAGEMENT**

My emergent findings offer insights about the manifestations of cultural brand engagement, and document variance in border crossers' use of brands as props in their experience construction within the unfamiliar cultural context. I find that brand use is dependent on border crossers' emic understandings of what it means to experience a culture and their assessment of the instrumental value of brands in realizing specific experiential motives. A

majority of the informants rely on brands when constructing their cultural “American college” experience. However, as can be seen in Table 1, two informants did not use brands as part of their cultural experience construction, that is, brands were not deemed instrumental to realizing their experiential motives. This finding supports the premise that a border crosser’s reliance on brands as part of the cultural experience construction is predicted on the border crosser’s judgments about the instrumental value of brands in relation to articulated experiential motives. Thus, when there is no perceived match between the experiential motives and the viability of brands as props in constructing the desired experience, border crossers may prefer other means to accomplish their desired cultural experiences.

For the border crosser informants who use brands when constructing their cultural experiences, the findings reveal three behavioral manifestations of cultural brand engagement: (1) planned brand engagement, (2) novel brand exploration, and (3) cultural brand discovery. Although each reflects a reliance on brands to construct the desired cultural experience, they differ in terms of how brands are used as props and in experience construction. In particular, I find evidence that the nature of experiential motives influences how the border crosser judges the relevance of brands as an integral experience prop in the unfamiliar cultural environment. Consequently, the three manifestations of cultural brand engagement reflect these differences in experiential motives by the border crosser.

Next, I present the findings related to each behavioral manifestation in detail, making specific references to the desired cultural experience as represented in experiential motives, cultural immersion, and the reliance on brands as props in the cultural experience construction. For each manifestation, I draw upon verbatims from multiple informants to showcase the border crossers’ emic perspectives of their brand use in relation to their experiential motives.

## **Planned Brand Engagement**

Planned brand engagement involves the border crosser's pursuit of a specific and predetermined cultural experience, a deterministic approach to understanding how brands can be used as part of the experience. For these border crosser informants, a desire for a predetermined cultural experience that aligns with pre-determined expectations implies a reliance on brands with iconic American meanings that appear to stay true to perceived cultural stereotypes.

Planned brand engagement involves searching for brands that contain American symbolism that are familiar from, for example, American TV shows and/or media about America shown in their home countries. These brands are considered ideal props for realizing an imagined and even prototypical "American experience" because they are consistent with perceived cultural stereotypes.

"I was quite excited about [going to Walmart] because Walmart is a very American brand. It was very big. I was surprised by Walmart in some ways. There's a gun section in there. I was, 'Oh, my gosh!' because that just seemed crazy. But again, it kind of fit in with American stereotypes." [Sarah, 20, U.K.]

"I was so excited the first time I went to [an American mall] because I could go to an Abercrombie store... I think it's an American brand and I know some of their clothes are my stereotype of American clothing, like casual, t-shirt, and jeans." [Jess, 25, Taiwan]

Planned brand engagement reflects very explicit experiential motives, expressed in terms of an "American" or an "American college" bucket-list, where the desired experience is articulated as a list of activities (e.g., football games, fraternity parties) that is grounded in American meanings presented in media within the home country. Planned brand engagement reflects active participation in college activities because this involvement allows the border crosser to construct the experience in line with these very specific experiential motives. As an illustration, Elise, a French exchange student, is adamant about attending college parties because

she associates American college life with “party life.” To facilitate the realization of her imagined college party performance, she has acquired an arsenal of branded clothing and cosmetics that she believes American students wear, based on symbolism acquired from watching American TV shows at home in France.

“I bought a lot of party clothes that I won’t wear in France. Very flashy, shiny, not good taste, short, very short, very like close to the skin, yeah and high heels. I mean I wear heels in France but not crop tops, I bought a bunch [at Urban Outfitters]... I bought all these clothes, but [sometimes] people are like ‘Oh, I can tell you’re not American’... I mean guys, of course. They’re way more flirty when you wear short stuff, or heels. They talk to you more easily, because I mean, if they don’t know that I’m European, they think that I’m like an American girl. But then they find out that I’m European, that I’m French, and they say, ‘Why are you dressed like that?’” [Elise, 21, France]

Interestingly, because she relies on expected brand usage meanings, rather than observed brand usage by locals, Elise actively situates her lived experience in relation to her deterministic experiential motives and even refers to her cultural experience as an “undercover operation” where she has to dress the part to get access to the activities she desires. Consequently, brands are instrumental to the construction of the cultural experience because they facilitate this temporary dramatic enactment and allow the border crosser to get access to activities on their bucket-lists. Brands may even enhance the experience by allowing the border crosser to dramatically enact specific roles at cultural activities in accordance with their imagined experience. For Elise, brands contribute to the reenactment of the desired experience by enhancing the thrill of the “undercover operation.”

“[My roommates chose] stuff that I wouldn’t have worn to a party [in France]. So I had heels, and mini denim shorts and the bright kind of shiny purple tank top that I had never worn before because I thought it was too much... I was looking transformed into the American party girl. So that was really fun. I wasn’t being serious about it. I was like undercover, or like wearing a costume, because it wasn’t me at all. But it was really fun anyways. I had to fit in [at the party], you know.” [Elise, 21, France]

Although Elise participates in these college girl role enactments, her experiential motives are not about self-transformation. Her experiences within the unfamiliar cultural context are not meant to change who she is; she does not let her French cultural identity influence her realization of the performance at the college party. Although her experience of the new culture involves active reflection of the self as an “undercover agent” in the experience construction, her experiential motives are focused on accumulating individual experiences that together tell a story about the “American college experience” as traditionally represented within her home culture.

In line with constructing a predetermined and imagined experience, planned brand engagement involves purposeful use of specific brands that are deemed instrumental in realizing a specific cultural experience, without assumptions that these brands reflect cultural authenticity in terms of actual usage by cultural locals. In the context of the idealized American college experience, my informants situate specific brands in relation to scripts for college activities that stem from how American college life is portrayed in media within the home culture. As an example, Sarah, an exchange student from the U.K., arrived in the U.S. with a precise idea in mind for what to do at an American college party. At the center of her imagined college party enactment is the red Solo cup. Interestingly, red Solo cups are critical to the construction of Sarah’s cultural experience because they provide a natural fit with her expected experience and the social context of the college party performance. To Sarah, the Solo brand is deemed instrumental because it fits naturally with the idealized performance script of the college party. Notably, as illustrated in the following exchange, the Solo cup must be red because without the iconic color, the brand does not fit with Sarah’s expectations and thus would not be considered instrumental to her dramatic realization of the college party performance:

*Sarah:* “I didn’t even know they were called Solo Cups before I came over, which is interesting. I just called them red cups and that’s what they were to me. They are very much affiliated with America back home just because they’re very visible; they’re a very visible product that is very intimately related with American culture and especially like college culture and parties and things like that. When I first got here I was, ‘I really have to drink out of a red cup.’ So, yeah, I think of it as very directly an American brand... Drinking out of red cups is associated with fun and... part of the college experience... Yeah, it was definitely on my list of things to do... It has to be red. Over Halloween they had different colored ones and my [friends and I] were like, ‘no, please, can we have the red ones?’ So we still drank out of the red ones just because it’s - it is the color association definitely more than anything else.”

*Interviewer:* “So, it would be wrong to drink out of a purple one?”

*Sarah:* “Yeah, definitely. Yep, has to be red... It’s just it’s more the feeling that ‘I’m in America.’ I’m only here for a year I think I’m very conscious of trying to get the American experience and to me that is very intimately linked with the American experience of being at university.”

By using the red Solo cup at American college parties, Sarah can experience American college life the way she imagined before arriving in the U.S. Thus, in addition to being instrumental to the creation of a predefined cultural experience, brands can also contribute more directly to the experience of a new culture because they make the border crossers feel connected to what they are experiencing. To Sarah, the Solo cup is representative of imagined usage by American students. Hence, planned brand engagement reflects the border crossers’ active search for specific brands that are deemed to be essential props in experiencing the temporary cultural context just as imagined before crossing the cultural border. Importantly, use of these brands is inherently confined to the temporary cultural experience. Although Sarah is excited about the brands she is using in the U.S., she has no intention to use these brands once she is home; rather they are integrally tied to her temporary American cultural experience.

“Some of them I think are good brands but, for the most part, I just think I’m using the experiences with [the brands]... I didn’t come over here to permanently change my shopping habits or permanently change where I live.” [Sarah, 20, U.K.]

In summary, planned brand engagement reflects the border crosser's purposeful pursuit of brands that align with an imagined American college experience which was shaped by movies and TV shows about American college life and broader cultural college symbolism. Although they need access to college activities to recreate their expected cultural experience, these border crossers have no desire for full cultural immersion, as this would reveal the actual, rather than imagined, experience of American students. Thus, participation in the backstage of the performance of college activities would be counterproductive considering that the experiential motive underlying planned brand engagement is to recreate experiences just as imagined prior to coming to America. In other words, realization of a predetermined cultural experience involves the use of brands that have imagined availability and meanings within the unfamiliar cultural space; these brands as depicted in media and marketing appeals are deemed representative of American college students' usage, and hence have instrumental value to the construction of the desired cultural experience.

### **Novel Brand Exploration**

Novel brand exploration reflects the border crosser's pursuit of an exciting and novel American experience and involves an active search for brands that are deemed to have "American only" meanings because such brands can aid in realizing a "unique" and "novel" cultural experience. In contrast to planned brand engagement, novel brand exploration reflects the border crosser's pursuit of a more general, albeit unique, American experience where brands are considered important props in terms of experiencing something new and exciting. Thus, novel brand exploration reflects a desire to experience what is "unfamiliar" about the cultural context. For example, Elizabeth, an exchange student from the U.K., relies on the American

connotations of American Eagle when assessing the brand's value to the construction of an different and exciting experience:

“I like the style of clothes [at American Eagle]. But then the second thing is, not only the clothes are nice, but it's kind of like, has America in the word, it's got the Eagle, it's again about the imagery. I mean I wouldn't go in there just because of the nice eagle and it's got America in the name, it's not like that, but you're kind of reassured that you're in America and it makes it a separate [experience].” [Elizabeth, 20, U.K.]

In contrast to planned brand engagement, novel brand exploration reflects a desire for a unique experience, rather than the need for a predetermined cultural experience. For Elizabeth, Walmart carries American meanings that related to how “American” it feels. Thus, Walmart's instrumental value to the construction of the cultural experience is determined by the brand's perceived cultural fit, which Elizabeth describes as a match between brand meanings and the cultural context:

*Interviewer:* “Why Walmart?”

*Elizabeth:* “I think there is something very American about like this massive shop by itself with the same car park and like its own road to get - and it just encompasses, like ‘this is America - we have the space to do this.’ And then you just have to go in; everything you can think of is under one roof... It's just fun also to go around the aisles and be like ‘look what I have here!’”

In order to categorize brands as uniquely American, these border crossers compare and contrast home and host culture brand usage to find brands that can be used as props in the construction of a novel cultural experience. For example, brands with American attributes or usage meanings (e.g., American Eagle, Abercrombie) that are not available within the home culture are deemed particularly instrumental to the experience construction because they are considered “uniquely American.” For Kelly, a Chinese graduate student, the instrumental value



of Abercrombie, as a fashion brand, is evaluated on how the style of the clothing differs from what she is used to at home.

“[Abercrombie] is a very surprising brand for me when I [first came here]... I didn’t find similar brands in China because the style is different. [Abercrombie] is kind of the American girl’s brand, American girl style... It is not similar to Chinese brands because it is the American girl style.” [Kelly, 27, China]

This distinction between home and host culture usage is important, not only to distinguish brands that are sufficiently novel, but also because it allows the border crosser to protect home culture brand relationships. For example, Sue, a graduate student from China, describes her experience with American fast food brands as inherently interlinked with her Chinese family identity. Her first memory of KFC has come to symbolize exploration of something exotic, while simultaneously representing family and Chinese values.

“So when I was very young, I think when I was five or six, [KFC] already started to enter the Chinese market... So we went to KFC in the New Year. We ordered some fried chicken, the smashed potato and some other things, maybe the corn and some sauce or fries, something like that. And they give me like a very funny toy for kids because I was six at that time. It’s my first experience of the fast food. ...That’s my first experience, and then we know, ‘Okay, KFC is an American brand’ and later ‘McDonald’s is an American brand.’... I will not go [to KFC in the U.S.] because I think my experience with them was all back at home, and it’s kind of a combination of both, like Chinese [experience] and American fast food. I would rather go to [Taco Bell] instead of McDonald’s and KFC [in the U.S.]... For Taco Bell I’m thinking at least it’s unique. I haven’t tried it at home.” [Sue, 28, China]

Sue clearly recognizes that both KFC and McDonald’s are familiar global American brands because they are available within the home culture. Therefore, while in the U.S., she prefers to seek out a novel American brand, Taco Bell, to fulfill her desire for an exciting American fast-food experience without interfering with her existing and committed relationship with KFC. For border crossers who engage in novel brand exploration, American brand meanings are not

enough to encourage brand use because many American brands are also global brands. Rather, these border crossers actively strive to find brands that are uniquely American, and thereby often become reliant on local American brands (i.e., brands that are available primarily or exclusively in the U.S.) as props in the experience construction. Thus, in contrast to planned brand engagement, novel brand exploration typically reflects an avoidance of global brands that are American brand icons (e.g., McDonald's, Nike) because those brands may carry specific home usage meanings, often related to identity and status.

Because a brand's instrumental value to the experience construction is primarily anchored in its lack of home culture usage meanings, border crossers who engage in novel brand exploration are active participants in cultural activities as they strive to access what is new and interesting. Overall, these border crossers desire the general excitement that can be derived from using the brand for the first time, but are not interested in pursuing specific brands related to a predefined experience. Without full immersion, degree of novelty becomes the most important brand attribute. Yet, novelty is not a lasting attribute and these border crossers quickly move on to other brands once the initial experience of novelty has dissipated. As novelty wears off, the brand loses its instrumental value to the experience construction. For example, Jasmine, a 30 year old graduate student from Iran, initially thought of Walmart as exciting and different.

However, after one year, her excitement for the brand has been replaced by indifference.

“Oh, my first shopping at Walmart, it was interesting, because there isn't any kind of stores and supermarket in Iran... You find everything [at Walmart], from sofa to clothes, baby stuff, and foods, other things. It was very interesting for me... But now, after one year, it's not interesting anymore for me.” [Jasmine, 30, Iran]

In summary, novel brand exploration involves a reliance on brands that are considered novel and uniquely American because they allow the border crosser to construct a uniquely

American cultural experience. Hence, in contrast to planned brand use, novel brand exploration involves the construction of a more general, but distinctly American, cultural experience. As such, these border crossers directly embrace what is unique about the unfamiliar cultural context, without being fully immersed in college related activities or connecting with the locals. This lack of full immersion in cultural activities allows the border crosser to experience American culture as exciting, without fully committing to an experience that may change existing conceptualizations of the self. Importantly, for these border crossers, brands that carry uniquely American meanings have instrumental value to the construction of a novel and exciting experience. However, in order to distinguish the brand as uniquely American, these border crossers rely on home culture meanings to identify brands that, in addition to being American, also lack important (and self-relevant) usage meanings within the home culture. Hence, assessment of a brand's instrumental value to the experience construction is directly dependent on availability of the brand within the unfamiliar cultural space and the lack of availability or strong presence of the brand within the home culture space.

### **Cultural Brand Discovery**

Cultural brand discovery reflects a desire for cultural exploration and full cultural immersion with the realization that such immersion may change existing conceptualization of the self. Hence, the experiential motives of these border crossers are similar to those of the cosmopolitan border crosser as conceptualized in previous research (Hannerz 1990; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). In particular, cultural brand discovery reflects experiential motives that are grounded in a desire for self-development, often articulated in terms of desired differences between the past and the future self; "I will be different when I return home." Because the idea

of keeping an open mind is so central to intellectualizing the experience, planning and reflecting on specific activities that should be consumed is considered constraining and even counterproductive. Tina, a graduate student from China, is illustrative as she expresses a desire for serendipitous discovery of the new culture:

“I don’t really want to set a plan, because I think it’s an experience and I will probably experience more when I just go there and lots of unexpected things will happen... [The experience] can be adventurous.” [Tina, 27, China]

For Tina and other border crossers who rely on brands to discover a new culture, an ideal cultural experience involves discovery of the authentic culture from the perspective of “how the locals live.” In the pursuit of such serendipitous cultural discovery and cultural authenticity, these border crossers show particular interest in participating in cultural activities that reflect how the locals experience their everyday life. Constructing a meaningful American college experience involves not only participation in the frontstage (i.e., attending college activities and interacting with American students), but also involvement in the backstage where the activity is organized and assembled and where the border crosser can become one of the locals and gain cultural insider status. Such involvement presumes access to cultural activities (e.g., frat parties, spring break), as well as insights into how such events are orchestrated and their significance to American students’ college experience. A desire for cultural discovery and authenticity also implies actively searching for brands that carry some authentic cultural meanings, defined in terms of evidence of real life usage by locals, because such brands can aid in constructing what can be considered an authentic cultural experience. Indeed, brands are part of the cultural exploration for these border crossers. As they become more immersed in the performance and get access to the backstage where real brand usage is revealed (i.e., how American students

actually use the brand), brands are purposefully analyzed and categorized based on evidence of actual usage, thereby effectively cataloguing the cultural experience in terms of what is needed to gain the desired insider status. For example, Stephanie, a 21 year old exchange student from France, devotes significant effort to decoding the typical college student outfit in terms of brands used.

“[American college students at this university] all wear The North Face [jackets and backpacks], UGGs, and Minnetonka shoes. What else? They have like a typical outfit, like sweatpants [and] hoodies. I got UGGs and Minnetonkas to look like a college student here.” [Stephanie, 21, France]

For Stephanie, brands are instrumental to constructing an authentic cultural experience because brands allow her to not only gain access to college activities by looking the part, but also judge her own degree of cultural immersion based on usage of specific brands that carry observable usage meanings (e.g., “I am one of the American students because I use the same brands as them”). The assessment of a brand’s instrumental value to the construction of the cultural experience is contingent upon understanding why different brands are used by the locals. For Stephanie, such assessment implies deliberate attempts to reflect on and understand why American college students use North Face, UGGs, and Minnetonkas by linking these brands’ attributes to the college lifestyle.

“They like to make life easier. So I mean UGGs are very comfortable and they’re warm in the winter, and Minnetonkas are also comfortable and they’re pretty easy to wear. And North Face, their backpacks are very practical, and they have sweaters also from the North Face. [These] brands are very practical... and go with American college [life]... [American students] are studying. They’re not here to make a fashion show.” [Stephanie, 21, France]

For border crossers who articulate a desire for cultural discovery and authenticity, brands also carry important experiential meanings as using the brand and intellectualizing its true meaning help imbue the experience with an aura of authenticity. These symbolic and experiential aspects of brand usage become especially evident when the border crosser is faced with opportunities to reject stereotypes and disconfirm expectations through evidence of actual brand use and brand preferences. In particular, the underlying desire for cultural discovery has an impact on brand use within the unfamiliar cultural space because brands that allow for insights into how “American college life really is” are more alluring; they carry more instrumental value to realizing the experience. The thrill of discovering the “authentic” dominates over expectations, and brands become instrumental to creating an understanding of what “American college life is actually like.” Once a brand is found to be inauthentic because it is not used by American college students, it is no longer deemed relevant as a prop in the construction of the experience. Opportunities to disconfirm stereotypes are embraced as the border crosser gains the cultural insider status by spending time with American students at various college activities. Importantly, a brand is deemed to be inauthentic when there is observational evidence that it lacks usage by the locals. For example, before she came to the U.S., Catherine, an exchange student from the U.K., imagined that Lucky Charms was a popular brand for American students. However, during her stay, she finds little evidence of actual usage by American students, and she is happy to embrace this “truth” about Lucky Charms because it contributes to her experience of discovering the authentic American college culture.

“[I thought] of Lucky Charms as the ‘American cereal.’ I thought everyone would be eating them here on [campus], but not a lot of people go for it... I guess somewhere in my head I was like, ‘they all eat Lucky Charms cereal obviously’ but then they [did not]. I don’t really feel bad about that... Now, I know better what goes on here. It’s better to know what is [actually] popular. [Catherine, 21, U.K.]

Similarly, Catherine relied on her expectations of the American symbolism of Cover Girl when first considering cosmetics brands. However, she also willingly embraces the truth about the brand when she discovers that her American friends prefer other cosmetic brands. Although she will not continue to use the brand, Cover Girl provides her with experiential meanings because it helps her define, with confidence, what brands are instrumental to her experience construction and what brands she should avoid. Cover Girl also helps her confirm her cultural insider status and being close to American students.

“One thing I wanted to try was Cover Girl, but that was only because I’d heard about it on America’s Next Top Model...I tried the lip seal, and that was okay, but I was just asking my [American college] friends ‘is Cover Girl actually good?’ And they were like ‘it’s not the best; it’s just there.’ So I just took [American college students’] word for it, that it wasn’t the best makeup you could get [because] they don’t like [the brand].”  
[Catherine, 21, U.K.]

The specific cultural meaning of America for American brands is dependent on both culturally specific meanings (i.e., used in a TV show that is distinctly American) and the associations with legitimate American identity referents (i.e., American college girls). Border crossers who engage with brands as part of pursuing cultural discovery prefer to limit their consumption to brands that are deemed to have “authentic” American meanings; yet, in line with keeping an open mind, they often purposefully refuse to articulate specific brands that carry American meanings beyond the obvious global American brands (e.g., McDonalds, Coca-Cola). Because cultural brand discovery involves a reliance on brands that are actually used by locals, brands are evaluated based on observational evidence and personal experiences, rather than broader symbolic and often mythical meanings conveyed in home culture media. As such, these border crossers often reject brands that are deemed as inaccurate representations of American college life. Interestingly, the desire for cultural discovery does not encourage these border

crossers to make distinctions between global and local American brands. For example, Nike and American Eagle are both used by American students and therefore carry authentic American meanings, although only the former is widely available in markets outside of the United States. Thus, a global brand may carry as much American meaning as a local American brand because brands are assessed based on observed cultural usage, not by country of origin or availability outside of the local space.

In summary, cultural brand discovery reflects a desire for cultural discovery and cultural authenticity. These border crossers are actively involved and strive for full participation (i.e., frontstage and backstage) in college activities because this allows them to partake in the assemblage of the activity and directly assess the sincerity of the performance (Goffman 1959, 1974). For border crossers who desire cultural discovery and cultural authenticity, brands are deemed instrumental to constructing the experience because they allow the border crosser to experience the culturally authentic, conceptualized in terms of how the locals live. In contrast to planned brand use and novel brand exploration, these border crossers are also particularly enthusiastic about brands that differ from stereotypes and what has been conceptualized as “American college brands” in home culture media because of their desire for cultural insider status. Hence, they carefully assess the instrumental value of a brand to the discovery of the new culture and rely on brands with observable usage meanings as props in the construction of the desired authentic cultural experience.

### **Cultural Brand Engagement Manifestations and Border Crosser Characteristics**

Cultural brand engagement may be a function of informant characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, and time spent in the new culture. As noted, my informants are female, and I



purposefully sampled from eight countries with different cultural, political, and economic environments. As shown in Table 1, each of the manifestations of cultural brand engagement includes informants from both Western and Eastern cultures, and more versus less developed countries, highlighting the importance of the individual's desired experience. In particular, informants from France, U.K. and China participate in cultural brand discovery; China, Iran, Turkey, UK engage in novel brand exploration and France, Ireland, Taiwan and UK are vested in planned brand engagement; the two unengaged are from Iran and India. Seemingly, however, Western informants are more likely engaged in cultural brand discovery, and Eastern informants are more likely engaged in novel brand exploration, thereby also showcasing how the influence of cultural distance may impact the desired experience and the ability to fully participate in cultural dramatic enactments. Moreover, it seems plausible that border crossers from Eastern cultures, because of cultural distance relative to the U.S., would be more able to find "novelty" in their brand engagement.

I observe differences across cultural brand engagement based on informant length of stay and expected length of stay in the U.S. (see Table 1). Informants engaged in cultural brand discovery and novel brand exploration have spent more time (ranging from three months to three years) in the new culture than those engaged in the planned brand engagement (i.e., three months to one year) in the United States before the first interview. As previously mentioned, Sarah, a U.K. informant expressed; "I was always very aware that I was coming over for a year and it was going to be a one year experience." Hence, the short time frame for planned brand engagement may influence the desire to create a predetermined American experience that includes specific brands. Notably, however, exchange students and other short term border crossers are

represented in both cultural brand discovery and novel brand exploration and thus length of stay may be an antecedent of cultural brand engagement.

## **TOWARD A THEORY OF CULTURAL BRAND ENGAGEMENT**

My research showcases how border crossers use brands as means to realize their desired cultural experiences. The findings support that experience consumption is motivational (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003) and that consumers use brands as means to realize their specific experiential motives. As shown on Figure 1, the three behavioral manifestations of cultural brand engagement (i.e., planned brand engagement, novel brand exploration, and cultural brand discovery) reflect differences in the border crosser's desired experience and the roles of brands in constructing the experience. My border crosser informants actively reflect on how they use brands within the unfamiliar cultural context, situating their brand use in relation to specific experiential motives, and purposefully assessing brand meanings to judge a given brand's instrumentality to the cultural experience construction. In this section, I present a theory of cultural brand engagement that is grounded in these findings and my conceptualization of brands as props in the construction of experiences within an unfamiliar cultural context.

### **Embracing the Unfamiliar Culture: Experiential Motives**

My findings highlight the importance of considering the border crosser's experiential motives as a driving force behind how brands are used to construct the cultural experience (see Figure 1). Importantly, experiential motives are shaped by expectations regarding the unfamiliar cultural context. Across the three behavioral manifestations of cultural brand engagement,

informants actively compare and contrast what they know with what they expect related to the cultural experience of being an American college students and brands in this context, often acknowledging differences and similarities and incorporating them into the articulated outcomes of the cultural experience. For some border crossers, the experience should align with an imagined experience that corresponds to the experience of American college that is depicted “back home” in movies and TV shows about American college life. In contrast, for other border crossers, the experiential motives are primarily focused on the attainment of a general, albeit unique cultural experience that differs from what can be experienced within the home culture space. Finally, for some border crossers the experiential motives revolve around cultural discovery and a desire to experience the culturally “authentic.” Hence, although all informants who are engaged actively and purposefully construct their desired cultural experience, how they do so is directly dependent on their experiential motives.

### **Immersion in the Construction of the Cultural Experience**

As is evident from my findings, the nature of the experiential motives will inevitably influence how the border crosser constructs the desired experience. Thus, as depicted in Figure 1, it is the articulated desired experience that dictates the degree of immersion necessary to attain the desired experience. For those border crossers who strive to realize a specific and predetermined cultural experience, the experience is actively framed as an “undercover operation” that allows the consumer to accumulate individual desired activities while the self is situated as a reflexive agent outside of the lived experience. These border crossers are therefore active participants in the experience because they need access to the activities on their bucket-lists. However, they have no desire for full cultural immersion and “backstage” access, as this

would reveal the actual, rather than imagined, experience of American students. Similarly, for those border crossers who desire a novel and exciting cultural experience, only active “frontstage” participation which allows these border crossers to experience American culture as exciting, without fully committing to an experience that may change existing conceptualizations of the self. In contrast, full immersion (i.e., frontstage and backstage) is necessary for those border crossers who desire cultural discovery and serendipitous cultural experiences; backstage provides the border crosser with the ability to partake in the assemblage of the cultural activity. Thus, my findings highlight the importance of considering the border crosser’s emic understanding of how their desired experience can and should be constructed.

### **Brands as Props in the Experience Construction**

Cultural brand engagement is inherently grounded in consumers’ purposeful and proactive use of brands as means to an end, rather than as end in itself. As shown in Figure 1, my border crosser informants’ reflections indicate that such instrumental value may be related to symbolic, experiential, and/or functional brand meanings. However and importantly, border crossers rely on different types of brand meanings as a consequence of articulated experiential motives (i.e., what the desired cultural experience is) and how brands can be used as part of the cultural experience construction (i.e., what type of “instrument” the brand is). For border crossers who engage in planned brand engagement, brands are essential tools for access to desired experiential activities and thus the instrumental value of a given brand is assessed based on its symbolic value to maintain a desired impression to an unfamiliar cultural audience that controls access to important activities (Goffman 1959). In contrast, for the border crossers who engage in novel brand exploration, the instrumentality of brands is related to creating and

maintaining sociocultural interactions and experiencing the insider status that comes from familiarizing oneself with the unfamiliar culture and even embracing the notion of “being a fish out of water.” Finally, for the border crossers who engage in cultural brand discovery, brands are carriers of important authentic meanings that allow them to connect with the cultural experience and realize more abstract experiential motives such as discovery or authenticity. Hence, it is the border crosser’s reflexive understanding of the self in relation to brand meanings that results in different behavioral manifestations of cultural brand engagement.

### **Brand Usage Meanings: Assessing the Brand’s Instrumental Value to Constructing Desired Cultural Experiences**

Border crossers rely on different types of brand meanings when making assessments and judgments about a brand’s instrumental value to realizing the desired cultural experience. My findings clearly show that such assessments and judgments are dependent on culturally anchored usage meanings because expected or actual usage provides the border crosser with vital information regarding how useful the brand will be to the construction of the desired cultural experience. Drawing upon the work on semiotic meaning processes by Grayson and colleagues (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Grayson and Shulman 2000), I delineate between indexical cultural anchoring and iconic cultural anchoring that influences the border crosser’s assessment of a brand’s instrumental value to the construction of the cultural experience. Brands have indexical meaning when the brand’s cultural real world anchoring is in “an objective, real (nonmental) world” (Grayson and Shulman 2000, p. 18). In other words, indexical cultural anchoring occurs when the border crosser observes the brand “in use” (e.g., watching Americans “in person” eat at McDonald’s or drinking out of a purple Solo cup). In contrast, brands may also

carry iconic cultural meanings related to an imagined cultural anchoring, such as imagined usage or beliefs related to representativeness of a given culture (e.g., imagining that Americans eat at McDonald's or drink out of red Solo cups). Thus, iconic meanings are associations that may allow for similar sensations as objects with indexical meanings because they share similar representations (Grayson and Martinec 2004). However, these iconic usage meanings are not grounded in an objective reality in terms of observational evidence of actual usage.

As depicted in Figure 1, the nature of the border crosser's experiential motives influences the brand usage meanings needed for a given brand to be considered a viable prop in the cultural experience construction. For border crossers who desire cultural discovery and authenticity, brands are only deemed instrumental if they have indexical usage meanings as reflected in actual usage by the locals. Alternatively, for those who desire a specific and predetermined cultural experience, brands with strong iconic meanings related to imagined usage by the cultural locals are more instrumental to recreate the experience just as imagined. For these border crossers, indexical usage meanings are often ignored or even rejected if they interfere with the realization of the predetermined experience. Finally, for border crossers who desire an experience that is novel, strong iconic brand usage meanings are desired as they help the border crosser define their experience that is "uniquely American." Interestingly, the findings also reveal that such active compartmentalization of the unique experience involves avoidance of brands that carry specific indexical home culture usage meanings because such brands interfere with the construction of the "uniquely American" experience.

My findings support that culturally anchored usage brand meanings (both indexical and iconic) influence the border crosser's judgment and assessment of a given brand in terms of how it can be used when constructing the desired cultural experience. For example, North Face is a

prevalent brand on the college campus in which this research took place, but is rarely depicted as representative of the American college culture or as uniquely American through symbolism. However, for informants who desire cultural discovery, North Face is an authentic American college brand because it has indexical usage meanings. For those informants who are determined to realize a specific college experience in line with expectations, however, North Face is not deemed a viable prop in the construction of the experience because it lacks iconic “college” meanings. In contrast, the red Solo cup is often depicted in media as a specific American college brand and therefore, with its iconic usage meanings, can serve as an ideal prop in recreating the imagined experience. Finally, for those who seek novelty and uniquely American meanings in terms of availability, brands such as American Eagle and Walmart, with their strong iconic American symbolism, are ideal props for constructing a unique cultural experience.

In line with previous research that argues that the assessment of a brand’s authenticity is inherently subjective and context dependent (Beverland and Farrelly 2010), reliance of brand meanings varies as a consequence of the experiential motives of the border crosser. Notably, this implies that the same brand can be assessed differently by different border crossers because a given brand may be seen as having both indexical cultural authenticity and iconic cultural authenticity. As shown in Table 1, some brands are prevalent across manifestations of cultural brand engagement because they carry both indexical and iconic meanings. For example, three informants rely on Abercrombie and Fitch (A&F) when constructing their cultural American college experience. Yet, the reasons for using A&F vary with the experiential motives of the border crosser. For Kelly, who desired a novel cultural experience, A&F has unique American symbolism that suits her desire for a novel and exciting American experience. In contrast, for Mary and Jess, who attempt to realize very specific and predetermined cultural experiences,

A&F has specific iconic usage meanings related to American college activities, derived from TV shows about American college life, and is therefore seen as instrumental in creating this predetermined cultural experience. Hence, although A&F is important to the construction of the cultural experience of all three of these informants, the underlying reasons for using the brand varies with experiential motives and the border crosser's emic understanding of what constitutes an instrumental brand to the realization of the desired experience.

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

My research and grounded theory of cultural brand engagement focuses on border crossers experiential motives, immersion in the cultural experience, and the use of brands as props. Thus, this research makes important contributions across several domains.

First, as related to experiential motives, previous research suggests that experiences are particularly important to self-definition (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Zauberger et al. 2009) and that consumers often consider experiences to be part of their overall desired (imagined or actual) life story (Giddens 1991). In particular, consumers often pursue experiences that are unique, memorable, and self-relevant (Keinan and Kivetz 2011) as part of "work on oneself" (Bourdieu 1986). My research considers experiences in the context of an unfamiliar cultural environment where the consumer inevitably has to consider their overall purpose of the experience (e.g., academic pursuit) in relation to more specific experiential motives such as participating in cultural activities and capturing some more abstract "cultural" meanings. In particular, my findings showcase that border crossers have various motives, at different levels of abstraction, and actively attempt to construct experiences that can realize these motives simultaneously.



Thus, in contrast to previous research on experience consumption that primarily has considered the antecedents and outcomes of extraordinary and special experiences (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014; Keinan and Kivetz 2011; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003; Zaubermaier et al. 2009), I consider the process by which consumers attempt to navigate different experiential motives by actively constructing their experiences and reflecting upon their roles as actors and producers of various elements of the experience.

Second and relatedly, my work explores experiential motives related to the American college context, a microcosm within the broader American context. In TV shows and movies, American college life is filled with specific activities (e.g., hanging out, partying, dating), identity referents (e.g., jocks, hipsters, nerds, sorority girls), and brands (e.g., Solo, A&F). The meanings associated with these activities, identity referents, and brands are inherently dramatic, and our findings show that border crossers find ways to construct their cultural experiences in line with dramatic college scripts, often derived from home culture media. Some of these college scripts are clearly rather mundane, corresponding with the notion that when in a new culture, the everyday mundane actions that represents a social identity (in this case, a female college student) can become exotic and representative of a broader cultural experience. As argued by Cohen and Taylor (1992), acting out a scene in a cultural performance can facilitate an escape from the routine of everyday life, simultaneously representing both novelty and authenticity. In this regard, my findings contribute by showcasing how what is considered “cultural” is inherently subjective and that experiential motives are framed by contrasting the unfamiliar with the familiar.

Third, my research makes a contribution to work on experience consumption by highlighting the dramaturgical perspective and how it can be used to understand construction of

cultural experiences. The focus of the cultural brand engagement theorization is on *how* the border crosser uses brands in line with the desired cultural experience. My findings clearly show that border crossers vary in how they want to construct their desired cultural experiences which, in turn, influence the degree of participation in cultural activities. For some border crossers, active “frontstage” participation is sufficient and even desired in order to realize a specific predetermined experience or a unique cultural experience. However, for those border crossers who desire cultural authenticity, full participation in both the “frontstage” and the “backstage” of cultural performances is necessary in order to realize a culturally authentic experience. Thus, the dramaturgical perspective, as explored in previous research on sky-diving (Celsi et al. 1993) and service experiences (Grove and Fisk 1992), also has value to understanding how border crossers use brands when enacting various roles as part of actively constructing their cultural experiences.

Fourth, my research showcases how brands may be used as props in the construction of experiences that occur “beyond the realm of everyday life” (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014, p. 2) and in an unfamiliar cultural context, thereby building upon previous research on how brand use is embedded in consumers everyday life (Fournier 1998). Specifically, although previous research has emphasized that consumers have “layman theories” for how they can remember their experiences (Zauberman et al. 2009), I show that consumers also have theories about how brands can aid in realizing desired experiences. In particular, my theory of cultural brand engagement highlights the importance of considering border crossers’ own reflections of how brands can be used as part of experience construction and that border crossers actively assess and judge how brands with different usage meanings may aid them in their experiential pursuits. Specifically, I find that border crossers, in their assessment of how instrumental a brand is to the construction of a desired cultural experience, often strive to find a match between how the

experience can and should be constructed and individual brand meanings related to actual or imagined usage within the cultural space. Some border crossers define their cultural experience in terms of its difference to the home culture and avoid brands that carry home culture meanings. Hence, both actual and imagined availability of a brand within the unfamiliar cultural context have an influence on how border crossers use the brand when constructing their experiences. Moreover, my findings document that border crossers often rely on brands as means to directly embrace the notion of “being a fish out of water” as part of experiencing a new culture. Thus, this research contributes to the relatively understudied area of how consumers reflect upon using brands to construct their desired experiences.

Finally, my research contributes to work on cultural border crossings and cultural authenticity. Previous work has documented that border crossings are highly symbolic (Belk 1997), and the nature of the stay within the new culture has implications for brand choice and the importance of brands in achieving specific experiential outcomes. For immigrants, the acculturation framework developed in previous research (Arnett 2002; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 1994) illustrates the many tensions consumers experience when they have to negotiate their home culture self with their host culture self (Askegaard et al. 2005). Moreover, immigrants often desire home culture maintenance and attach significant meanings to home culture possessions that carry strong relational meanings (Mehta and Belk 1991). In contrast, global nomads show little attachment to possessions as they travel from country to country (Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012). In this research, I find that some border crossers rely on brands as facilitators of cultural experiences and purposefully avoid comparisons with home culture brand meanings. Importantly, my findings document that not all informants fit the mold for the traditional cosmopolitan border crosser depicted in previous research (Hannerz 1990; Thompson

and Tambyah 1999). Using a diverse cultural sample, I find clear differences in border crossers' desire for cultural authenticity. In particular, the conceptualization of what the border crosser considers to be "authentic" often differs greatly from the traditional romantic notions of authentic culture as being primitive and pure, uncontaminated by Western values (Lindholm 2008). This is especially evident when considering that brands, with their inherently commercial meanings, can be considered culturally authentic. Specifically, I find evidence for reliance on different types of semiotic meanings as part of the experience construction, thus highlighting that cultural authenticity can be studied beyond the traditional sphere of cultural products (e.g., dance, ethnic foods). Interestingly, my findings indicate that the idea of an "authentic" American brand is related to, but not necessarily equivalent to, actual or imagined usage by Americans, American origin, and American symbolism, thus demonstrating the added complexity of cultural context to brand meaning assessment. Border crossers may rely on different strategies when engaging with brands and the same brand may serve different symbolic and experiential roles to border crossers with different experiential motives. Moreover, even mass-marketed global and local American brands (e.g., Walmart, Solo) can be deemed culturally authentic if they provide the border crosser with a prop that enables a convincing performance. Thus, the theory of cultural brand engagement reflects the sociocultural context in which the brand is encountered (or expectations that it should be encountered there), and the border crossers' desire to use brands when constructing their cultural experiences.

### **Directions for Future Research**

My research provides the basis for additional work on cultural experience construction, authenticity, and consumption meanings. First, research is needed to further explore the

interrelationship between cultural authenticity and the symbolic associations consumers attach to the “exotic” and the “novel” when constructing their experiences. My findings indicate that some border crossers use brands to construct novel experiences, and therefore purposefully search for brands that carry such associations. However, a brand that is considered “novel” may also carry unique “exotic” cultural meanings that appeal to border crossers who are looking for strong cultural symbolism in the brands they engage with. Hence, novelty and cultural exoticism appear to be related, yet distinct, brand associations. Moreover, previous research suggests that when a symbol loses its exotic meaning and becomes a mainstream and widely used symbol of a particular culture (e.g., shamrock as a symbol of Irish culture), it is seen as less authentic (Lindholm 2008). More research is needed to understand the complex interplay between visibility and prevalence of cultural symbols and their evolving meanings pertaining to assessment of a brand’s instrumental value to the construction of a specific cultural experience.

Second, although each of the manifestations of cultural brand engagement includes informants from both Western and Eastern cultures, seemingly Western informants are more likely engaged in cultural discovery, whereas Eastern informants are more likely engaged in novel cultural exploration. This finding suggests that cultural distance may influence experiential motives and the ability to fully participate in cultural dramatic enactments as part of constructing the experience. I speculate that border crossers from Eastern cultures, because of relatively more unfamiliarity with the cultural context due to more cultural distance, would be more able to find novelty in their cultural exploration and have less predetermined motives regarding what can and should be experienced. Future research can explore how cultural distance and perceptions of cultural differences influence the border crosser’s experiential motives and reliance on brands as props in the experience construction. Relatedly, future research could also explore how cultural

brand engagement is manifested for those who cross “cultural” borders within a national culture. For example, would experiential motives influence brand use for those who move from one American state to another?

Third, in this research, I rely on an all-female sample of border crossers and the American college experience as the venue. Although I would anticipate similar manifestations of cultural brand engagement from using a male sample, my research design is limited in that I am not able to compare gendered differences in assessment of culturally anchored gendered brand meanings. Research has shown that brands may carry specific symbolic gender associations that influence brand relationships and the actions consumers take to prevent gender contamination of their favorite brands (Avery 2012). Future research could examine the interplay of cultural usage meanings and gendered usage meanings to consumer’s assessment of a brand’s value to experience construction.

Finally, previous research in environmental psychology suggests that individuals attach significant identity meanings to their “home” (Hernández et al. 2007). Consequently, when “home” is different from the current place of residence, individuals are more likely to feel lost or dislocated, thereby making identity narrative cohesion difficult (Dixon and Durrheim 2004). Future research could specifically examine the effects of such feelings of dislocation on the desire for participation in cultural activities that differ from home (i.e., experiences that are inherently unfamiliar). My findings indicate that border crossers are adaptive and often actively attempt to protect their self-identities from cultural meanings that are too unfamiliar in the sense that they differ substantially from “home.” However, as is evident for some of the informants, some loss of self is not only inevitable, but desirable as part of constructing an extraordinary experience, thus highlighting the flexibility and accommodating nature of border crossers

experiential pursuits. Clearly, more research is needed to understand the tensions between “home” and the unfamiliar as we move towards a view of acculturation as an adaptive and experiential process.

## CHAPTER 3: ESSAY 2

### MORAL BRAND ENGAGEMENT: COLLECTIVE MORAL FRAMING OF COUNTERFEIT CONSUMPTION BY LUXURY BRAND CONSUMERS

“Most people (myself included) who carry authentic bags will at some point have been asked ‘How could you spend so much money on a handbag??!’ (or something similar)... they might love the style of handbag but just don't get how someone could pay so much money for it...”

“I actually had a complete stranger (who was wearing a fake version of my bag) tell me quite loudly in the middle of a grocery store that I was a horrible person for spending so much money on a useless item. She asked me how I could live with myself knowing that the money I spent on my bag could be put to good use at a charity...”

*(Quotes from an online discussion forum dedicated to luxury handbag brands)*

Demand for luxury products has increased dramatically in the last two decades (Thomas 2007). More than ever, middle-class consumers are “trading-up” by splurging on luxury brands in a few carefully selected product categories, such as clothing, handbags, and gourmet foods (Silverstein and Fiske 2008). Interestingly, demand for luxury brands tends to increase during economic recessions (Clifford 2011) because branded luxury products, with their conspicuous logos and status signals, are often particularly coveted by consumers with less income who are trying to “keep up with the Joneses” through “status-conferring consumption in order to reduce the dissatisfaction they feel with their current level of possessions due to the widening gap between what they have and what others have” (Ordabayeva and Chandon 2010, p. 27). Despite this “democratization of luxury” (Thomas 2007, p. 259), public opinion research documents that many American consumers find acquisition of luxury goods objectionable (Center for a New American Dream 2014). Indeed, extant work on materialism suggests that consumers who are perceived as being motivated by the acquisition of money and possessions are likely to be



stigmatized as being selfish and self-centered (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010), immoral and inauthentic (Wilk 2001), and as being unattractive relationship partners (Solberg, Diener, and Robinson 2004). Thus, consumers of conspicuous branded luxury goods often have to consider the trade-off between the signaling of status and affluence with the possibility of being stigmatized as a selfish and immoral individual.

At the same time that luxury brand consumption has grown, so has the global consumption of counterfeits, now estimated to \$1.77 trillion globally (International AntiCounterfeiting Coalition 2014). In the United States, seizures of counterfeit goods increased by 22% between 2010 and 2013, with branded luxury handbags and wallets being the top commodity seized in 2013 (35% of all seizures) at an estimated retail value of over \$700 million (Department of Homeland Security 2013). Given these staggering statistics, it is not surprising that consumer researchers have set out to document the characteristics of counterfeit consumers and their motivations for consuming counterfeits (Phau and Teah 2009; Wilcox et al. 2009).

This coexistence of luxury brands and their counterfeit counterparts creates a provocative context for exploring the moral tenets of luxury consumption. In particular, anecdotal evidence suggests that counterfeits are often seen as viable and even moral alternatives to traditional luxury brands, an opportunity to “get the same for less” (La Ferla 2007; Ramirez 2006). Thus, the prevalence of counterfeits in the marketplace may further contribute to the negative connotations of luxury brand consumption because many consumers consider counterfeits to be affordable alternatives to traditional luxury brands. However, in line with Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry’s (1989) assertion that the sacred is defined at least partly by its opposition to the profane, the prevalence of counterfeits in the marketplace may also provide luxury brand consumers with

an opportunity to legitimate their own luxury consumption by moralizing counterfeit consumption.

In this research, I examine how luxury brand consumers, who have experienced loss of legitimacy due to the normalization of counterfeit consumption, construct and define their brand engagement practices as part of their moral identity projects. My research relies on data from a discussion forum dedicated to luxury handbag brands. This particular research site and product category affords an opportunity to explore how luxury brand consumers, across a variety of brands, actively engage in collective moral framing of the “profane” counterfeit in order to attain consumption legitimacy for the “sacred” genuine luxury brand. Specifically, by relying on both qualitative frame analysis and quantitative content analysis of discussion forum threads and posts, I examine how luxury brand consumers act individually and collectively to mobilize as a social movement with an objective to legitimate luxury consumption by undermining the moral status of counterfeit consumption.

My work makes important contributions to our understanding of consumer-brand engagement. First, building on previous conceptualizations of brand engagement as consumers’ instrumental and goal directed use of brands through “cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions” (Brodie et al. 2013; Hollebeek 2011a, p. 790), I introduce *moral brand engagement* as consumers’ purposeful interactions with brands in pursuit of consumption legitimacy. Specifically, I explore moral brand engagement in light of consumption legitimization by luxury brand consumers with attention to the interplay of consumer identity projects, marketplace resources, and consumer ideologies (Humphreys and Latour 2013; Giesler 2008). Second, whereas past research has focused on how individual luxury brand consumers adapt their brand relationships in the face of counterfeits (Commuri 2009), my work examines

the collective moral framing of counterfeit consumers and consumption practices, providing insights about how luxury brand consumers collectively engage in moralization of counterfeit consumption. This collective mobilization strategy enables these consumers to define and frame the moral threat posed by counterfeits, thereby attempting to directly influence institutions and stakeholders (e.g., other consumers, companies, regulatory agencies). Moreover, I find that this collective approach allows luxury brand consumers to imbue their own consumption with moral meaning, thus undermining materialistic associations by reaffirming the original brand as the “moral” alternative to counterfeits. Third and relatedly, my work provides a contrast with work on brand loyalists and brand communities that strive to protect brands from evolving or opposing brand meanings (Avery 2012). The luxury brand consumers studied in this research are faced with the threat of a brand doppelgänger that is directly emphasizing, and even promoting, its similarity to the original brand, often receiving recognition and praise for being “just as good” as the original (Bensinger 2001). Hence, this context affords an opportunity to explore how luxury brand consumers actively oppose proclaimed brand similarities by developing a moral framework that explicates how the “sacred” genuine differs from the “profane” counterfeit.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Does the Devil Wear Prada? The Moral Detriment of Luxury Consumption**

“War destroys man, but luxury destroys mankind; at once corrupts the body and mind.”

*(John Crowne, Caligula, 1698)*

Early work on morality and consumption often portrayed consumption of luxury goods as inherently immoral due to narcissism and social decay (Berry 1994; Wilk 2001). In particular,

conspicuous luxury consumption was seen as an immoral and wasteful exhibition of wealth in pursuit of status (Veblen 1899). According to Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and more recent consumer behavior extensions (Allen 2002; Üstüner and Thompson 2012), status is the primary expression of social class and consumers express their cultural capital through consumption practices, thereby creating and sustaining taste regimes (Arsel and Bean 2013). Luxury brands may be perceived as legitimate signals of status, especially when accompanied by a system of taste experts that have insider knowledge regarding the relative status value of various brands (Berger and Ward 2010). However, luxury brands may be particularly prone to moralistic associations of ostentatious and wasteful exhibition of wealth (Berry 1994; Veblen 1899) as they have conspicuous logos and symbols that signal not only acquired wealth, but also a desire for higher status. Although some high-end luxury brands use a “no logo” strategy (e.g., Hermes, Bottega Veneta) to appeal to a select few “in the know” consumers (Berger and Ward 2010; Thomas 2007), most luxury brands today carry at least some products targeted to the masses, thereby promoting “accessible luxury” (Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010, p. 15).

Trends in the marketplace suggest that American middle-class consumers are both willing and able to spend money on luxury products in at least a few carefully chosen product categories, a phenomenon which has been labeled “trading up” (Silverstein and Fiske 2008). However, research suggests that expression of personal success and wealth within a given social class, in particular for the lower and middle class, often has to be counterbalanced with associations related to the Protestant work ethic and community solidarity (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013). Thus, material acquisition may reflect poorly on a consumer who is deemed not “deserving” of luxury goods; eliciting associations of selfishness and lack of caring for others (Van Boven et al. 2010) and “sinful” associations, such as greed, gluttony, and pride (Belk

1983). In contrast, frugal consumers are often perceived as being more moral because they “make do with what they have” and actively oppose or resist the temptation from luxury products that are seen as frivolous and detrimental to achieving spiritual growth (Lastovicka et al. 1999). Hence, although consumers may “treat themselves” with luxury goods, they are often made to feel guilty about their purchases because they could have spent the money on products that qualify as necessities (Silverstein and Fiske 2008). As noted by Henry (2010, p. 671), the American consumer is often forced to balance “bountiful consumption” with “self-restraint,” which contribute to “tensions between selfishness and the collective good.”

The difficult balancing act of trading up while retaining favorable associations inevitably involves negotiation of identity. Research in both psychology and sociology acknowledges that consumers often go to great lengths to be perceived as moral individuals, constructing their identities and acting in accordance with what is prototypically seen as the characteristics of a “good person” (Aquino and Reed 2002; Reynolds and Ceranic 2007). A perceived moral “character flaw,” such as being materialistic, may have profound implications for identity construction because the consumer becomes morally discreditable in the eyes of others (Hannem 2012, p. 18). A personal attribute becomes a stigma when it is “deeply discrediting” because it is related to a negative stereotype (Goffman 1963, p. 3). Stigmatization occurs when an individual with a discrediting attribute interacts with those who are deemed normal because they lack that attribute (Hannem 2012). When such interactions occur, consumers may accept their marginalization, or actively attempt to change the circumstances of the stigma, either by changing their own characteristics (if possible) or by attempting to change what is considered normal. Collective coping strategies are especially common because finding others who share the same character flaw may enable the consumer to turn the stigmatized attribute into something

that is valued and even desired, thereby rejecting the “standards according to which the individual judged him- or herself to be a failure and the object of rejection” (Kaplan and Liu 2000, p. 218). Hence, the consumer can be part of changing the social landscape to create a new “normal” that is more inclusive.

Moreover, through collective coping strategies, such as participation in protests, social movements, and communities, marginalized consumers can more directly influence the legitimacy of their consumption practices, thus simultaneously undermining the perceived character flaw that may result from such consumption practices. Legitimacy is defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p. 574) and the process of legitimation captures how a consumption practice becomes congruent with prevalent norms and values (Humphreys and Latour 2013). Sometimes consumers collectively attempt to influence marketing agents or marketplace offerings to become more inclusive (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). However, a more common approach appears to be collective activism where consumers become active proponents of a consumption-related cause, using their collective powers to “make their voices heard” and sometimes undermine the legitimacy of those practices that are considered “normal” (Kates 2004; Thompson and Arsel 2004). Through collective protests, consumers can negotiate the identity crisis brought on by a perceived character flaw and attempt to (re)gain legitimacy for their consumption practices. Hence, a consumer who is perceived as materialistic because of luxury consumption may cope with such stigmatization by finding other consumers who share the same perceived “character flaw,” to collectively redefine what is considered legitimate. In the case of the “materialistic” luxury-brand consumer, the prevalence of counterfeits in the marketplace may

provide an opportunity to justify spending on luxury goods by redefining what is considered “moral consumption.”

### **Does the Devil Wear Counterfeit Prada? Moralization of Counterfeit Consumption**

Consumers who are considering “trading up” to luxury brands are inevitably faced with an opportunity to choose between genuine-item products and counterfeits. In fact, it has been argued that the “democratization of luxury” has so profoundly influenced the supply and demand for counterfeit goods that the number of counterfeits for some brands now dwarfs the genuine-brand products (Thomas 2007, p. 274). The reasons why consumers buy counterfeit products is well-documented in previous consumer research (Albers-Millers 1999; Wilcox et al. 2009). In particular, evidence suggests that consumers, in their self-presentation quests, often emphasize that counterfeits are a “good value” as compared to the high prices of the genuine-brand product, providing them with an opportunity to get nearly the same identity signals for less money (Bloch, Bush, and Campbell 1993; Phau and Teah 2009). Moreover, the possible moral implications of counterfeit purchases are often not salient during the purchase decision. For example, in a recent survey of British consumers’ attitudes towards counterfeits, more than 50% of respondents reported that they had purchased counterfeits, despite the fact that 90% reported that they believe that counterfeiting is morally wrong (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2013). These findings support that, although moral values are associated with counterfeit consumption and production, these values have not yet been internalized to where they influence most consumers’ purchase decisions. Indeed, counterfeit consumption may be deemed a legitimate consumption practice, in part, because it has not yet been fully moralized.

Moralization is defined as the “accretion of moral value to activities or substances that previously had no moral value” (Rozin and Singh 1999, p. 321), and is often considered an important prerequisite to consumption legitimacy. For example, cigarette smoking and vegetarianism, as consumption practices, have become moralized over time through the incorporation of moral values related to the harmfulness of second-hand smoking and the welfare of animals (Rozin 1999; Rozin, Markwith, and Stoess 1997; Rozin and Singh 1999). As a consequence of such moralization, cigarette smoking has become morally reprobate and vegetarianism morally legitimate, as reflected in the banning of smoking through laws and regulations, and the now customary vegetarian options on restaurant menus. Notably, counterfeit consumption has yet to become reprobate in the eyes of consumers and legislative institutions. For example, recent efforts to criminalize counterfeit consumption in the United States (purchasing counterfeits is not illegal in the U.S.) have been halted due to a fear of creating what has been labeled a “soccer-mom” crime (Parker 2013). Thus, although counterfeiting has been linked to organized criminal activities such as human trafficking and smuggling of narcotics (Thomas 2007), these moral implications have not been internalized to the extent that they impact the moral status of the counterfeit consumer.

Moreover, in some cases, counterfeit consumption is vindicated by framing luxury brands, such as Gucci, Prada, and Louis Vuitton, as taking advantage of consumers’ “need” for luxury by charging exorbitant prices for their products (the markup of a luxury branded leather handbag is usually 10 to 12 times the production cost; Thomas 2007). In this regard, counterfeit luxury consumption shares similarities with music downloading which is often framed through the social utilitarian perspective of cultural resources that “must be equally and simultaneously accessed and experienced by all” (Giesler 2008, p. 740). Hence, consumers may feel entitled to



the creative cultural outcomes of luxury production, without feeling morally obligated to pay the brand for its creation. Taken together, this previous work suggests that counterfeit consumption carries conflicting and multifaceted moral connotations and meanings which may complicate its moralization process.

### **Collective Moral Framing: Enacting the Role of the “Moral Consumer”**

Given the importance of morality to identity construction and social movements (Aquino and Reed 2002; Polletta and Jasper 2001), it is not surprising that most consumer activists and consumer movements can be subsumed under the broad umbrella of “moralistic identity work,” where consumers “dramatically enact their ideological beliefs in ways that confer a particular form of identity value to marketplace resources” (Luedicke et al. 2010, p. 1017). Specifically, as part of moral identity construction, movement adherents create shared definitions of the movement’s purpose that can be incorporated into practices, rituals, and cultural artifacts (Melucci 1996). This process has been labeled “framing” where adherents strive to achieve “a common definition of a social problem and a common prescription for solving it” (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). This common definition, or interpretative framework, emerges out of the movement’s “struggle to realize and define its interests” (Taylor and Whittier 1992, p. 110). The “moral consumer,” as an ideological identity template, appears to be flexible enough to capture a broad range of consumer activism and protesting, such as the anti-globalization and anti-global brand movements (Varman and Belk 2000), the organic food movement (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), and boycott of specific brands (Kates 2004; Klein, Smith, and John 2004). In some cases, specific consumption practices or brands are framed as particularly harmful or unjust, as in the case of Starbucks and Walmart hurting local businesses (Thompson

and Arsel 2004) and Coors Brewery discriminating against gays (Kates 2004). A particular consumer group may also be portrayed as the immoral “villains” of the marketplace because of what their consumption practices are seen as representing (e.g., environmentalism vs. patriotism) (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Luedicke et al. 2010).

Social movements build moral frameworks by constructing cause-specific frames, often labeled “collective action frames” (Snow and Benford 1992, p. 137). Social movement theorists rely on Goffman’s (1974, p. 21) conceptualization of frames as schemata of interpretation to “locate, perceive, identify, and label.” More formally, Snow and Benford (1992, p. 137) define a frame as “an interpretative schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment.” However, most frames constructed by movements are more interactive than traditional schemata because they are the outcomes of shared and negotiated meanings among the movement adherents (Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson 1992). Importantly, a movement’s frames will be assessed not only by movement adherents, but also by potential adherents, important stakeholders, and opponents. An existing frame may be assessed for credibility in terms of empirical support (i.e., concrete evidence) or how culturally believable it is (i.e., can the adherents identify with the problems promoted by the frame?). Frames also vary in how inclusive they are in terms of different themes incorporated and how they serve to support for movement mobilization (Benford and Snow 2000). Consequently, the framing task involves the careful assembling of evidence and emotional themes into distinguishable frames that are expressive of the moral purpose of the movement.

When brands are part of a consumer movement, the framing process implies a need to create congruence between frames and brand meanings. Sometimes, opposition may be created

because of perceived differences between the desired characteristics of the consumer and the perceived attributes of the brand. Thompson et al. (2006, p. 50) coined the phrase “doppelgänger brand image” to describe the phenomenon where negatively framed stories about successful brands are circulated among activists, bloggers, and various consumer groups to become a “coherent set of opposing meanings that plague brands that otherwise have attained competitive success through emotional-branding strategies.” For example, Nike has become the poster child of sweatshop labor, and Starbucks and Walmart have been framed as villains that threaten local businesses and the welfare of smaller communities. By consuming brands, and, in particular brands prone to doppelgänger imagery, a consumer may be faced with the threat of triggering associations that reflect a lack of moral character. Brands that are part of consumers’ identity narratives (Fournier 1998) must not only align with what is considered appropriate with a given identity template (Kates 2004), but also often converge with what is considered legitimate and “taken for granted” within a given market or society (Humphreys 2010; Suchman 1995). Building upon this extant work, my research examines how luxury brand consumers strive to (re)gain legitimacy and improve their moral status through collective framing of the counterfeit “doppelgänger” and its consumer.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Site**

With an agenda to explore luxury brand consumers’ quest for legitimacy through moral brand engagement in a collective context, I conducted an analysis of threads and posts from a large online discussion forum dedicated to luxury handbag brands, such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Prada. This forum was founded in 2005 as a way for “fashionistas” to share their

thoughts, love, and passion for luxury fashion brands. In line with previous online community research (Kozinets et al. 2010; Muñiz and Schau 2005, 2007; Thompson and Sinha 2008), the name of the forum will not be disclosed and all usernames have been replaced by identification-numbers in the interest of protecting the anonymity of those who post their views and thoughts on the forum. Although this discussion forum includes a myriad of fashion-related topics, it is primarily dedicated to discussion of luxury handbag brands. It is noteworthy that the “handbags and accessories” category was the top commodity seized at U.S. borders in 2013 (both by volume and dollar value), following a steady increase over the past 10 years (Department of Homeland Security 2013). Moreover, the average American woman buys as many as four handbags a year, and handbags are often considered the “entrance product” to luxury consumption because they are so easy to purchase (i.e., no sizing or fitting necessary), they have conspicuous logos (i.e., strong identity signaling power), and are made in a variety of materials (e.g., leather, canvas, nylon) to appeal to women of a wide range of disposable incomes (Han et al. 2010; Thomas 2007, 167). Hence, this specific product category is particularly relevant to explore both the moral tenets of luxury brand consumption and the impact of counterfeits on luxury brand consumers.

### **Preliminary Analysis**

The initial analysis of the forum was exploratory and observational (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Ward and Ostrom 2006) with focus on understanding how luxury brand consumers are affected by negative materialistic associations related to their consumption of “luxury.” During a six-month period, I monitored the forum’s discussion board and noted popular discussion topics and threads that were particularly active in terms of number of posts.

This initial exploratory analysis revealed that the forum serves as a haven (Hirsch 1989, 1990) for luxury brand consumers to manage the threat of stigma by sharing their problems and concerns with similar others. Importantly, the initial analysis also revealed that discussions of counterfeits appear very frequently across many threads; approximately 30% of all threads on the general (non-brand specific) discussion forum were dedicated to discussing some aspect of counterfeits. In particular, stories and brand-related consumption narratives often included references to counterfeits as morally reprobate and as a threat to the consumer or the brand. Thus, the initial observational analysis served as a foundation for more in-depth analysis on what, if any, role counterfeits play in legitimating luxury brand consumption.

### **Sampling Frame**

Following the initial analysis, data were collected by downloading forum threads related to counterfeit consumption. Specifically, a search of “counterfeit” on the discussion forum resulted in 464 threads, from which I selected a random sample of 150 threads. The sample included threads from nine consecutive years (2006-2014), and the average number of posts per year was 1,165 (SD = 572). Overall, the 150 threads included 10,489 posts (691,598 words) from 4,379 posters (as identified by unique user names). The average number of posts by poster was 2.40 (SD = 3.59, Mode = 1); 29.1% of posters had posted on two or more of the 150 threads and 4.7% of posters had posted on five or more of the 150 threads. The average number of threads posted by poster was 1.64 (SD = 1.59), and due to this low mean ( $< 3$ ), I was not able to conduct “per poster” analyses over time.

## **Qualitative Frame Analysis**

In line with previous research using discourse analysis (Humphreys 2010), the data were first analyzed using qualitative analysis. Specifically, I employed frame analysis (Goffman 1974; Snow and Benford 1992; Ward and Ostrom 2006) to uncover the dynamics of: (1) stigmatized luxury consumption with the perceived threat posed by counterfeits, and (2) the specific moral framework constructed by luxury brand consumers in response to this threat. In social movement studies, frame analysis is the study of patterns and emergent structural linkages of movement related texts, such as documented conversions between movement adherents (Johnston 2002). Because frames can be uncovered by moving back and forth between a holistic view of the collective and the unique voices of the individuals who participate (Snow and Anderson 1991), this analysis involved part-to-whole iterations and comparing emergent themes to theory (Jayanti and Singh 2010; Spiggle 1994). Specifically, I conducted within-thread analysis by comparing posts by different posters, outlining the themes presented, and comparing these themes to existing theory on luxury consumption, counterfeits, and social movement mobilization to uncover frames that can be categorized based on moral positions and justifications. This analysis revealed two distinct aspects of discourse related to luxury brand consumption in juxtaposition to counterfeit consumption. The first revolves around consciousness-raising in response to the loss of status signaling by luxury brands in the face of counterfeits and wasteful spending as a moral threat. The second focuses on luxury brand consumers' engagement in three framing activities: product framing, person framing, and context framing. Thus, I conducted across-thread analysis by comparing threads based on their respective frame content (i.e., what is talked about) and the nature of the framing (i.e., how is it talked about).

## **Quantitative Content Analysis**

Similar to other studies of legitimacy and framing (Humphreys 2010; Humphreys and Latour 2013; Humphreys and Thompson 2014), my research combines qualitative frame analysis with a quantitative content analysis. Content analysis can be particularly useful to capture nuances in movement discourse and to measure systematic differences between frames (Neuendorf 2002), thereby improving the validity of the findings (Johnston 2002). Moreover, a content analytic approach can also capture differences in discourse over time (Humphreys 2010), and this is particularly useful as frames evolve over time in response to changing demands of the movement and various contextual or institutional constraints (Benford and Snow 2000).

Following the qualitative frame analysis, I conducted a quantitative content analysis using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC). Similar to Humphrey et al. (2010), a custom dictionary was created based on the framing activities uncovered in the qualitative analysis. An overview of this dictionary, with example words, can be found in Table 2. In addition, the analysis included the standard dictionary created for LIWC by Pennebaker et al. (2007). Importantly, although LIWC generates the percentage of words used for each construct, my content analysis is based on the proportion of posts/posters that reference the construct (regardless of number of words used). This more traditional approach to content analysis (Cutler and Javalgi 1992; Neuendorf 2002) was deemed more useful to capture frame construction as it reflects the overall importance placed on each construct across posts, rather than the overall importance placed on a construct within a post. A within-thread analysis was also conducted to reveal patterns of frame agreement and to capture differences in emotions as a given conversation evolves. Finally, as frames often evolve over time (Benford and Snow 2000), the

data were divided into three time periods (2006-2008; 2009-2011; 2012-2014) to compare post content over time.

## **CONCIOUSNESS-RAISING AND MOVEMENT MOBILIZATION: STIGMATIZED LUXURY BRAND CONSUMPTION AS MORAL IDENTITY THREAT**

Research documents that materialism is often considered an undesirable trait (Van Boven et al. 2010) and that “luxury” carries negative connotations and associations related to narcissism and immorality (Berry 1994; Veblen 1899; Wilk 2001). The data indicate that the discussion forum is a haven (Hirsch 1989) for luxury handbag consumers who are faced with the threat of stigma due to materialistic associations; the forum provides the posters/visitors with an opportunity to express concerns and become aware of common issues and problems faced by other luxury brand consumers. From a social movement perspective, forum discussions are essential to consciousness-raising, a prerequisite to mobilization and frame construction (Hirsch 1990). In this section, I discuss the qualitative data that reveal the moral threats to consumers of “sacred” luxury brands via: (1) “observational” awareness of the pervasiveness of profane counterfeits in the marketplace which erode the signaling power of “sacred” luxury brands, and (2) “in your face” abuse/berating by counterfeit consumers/others for engaging in luxury brand consumption. Then, I address how this consciousness-raising influences movement mobilization by encouraging forum members to rally around the collective action frame, “counterfeit consumption is immoral.”



### **Loss of Identity Signaling Power: “There are Just so Many of Them!”**

As noted, sales of counterfeit luxury brands have increased dramatically in the last decade such that the number of counterfeits now dwarfs the genuine versions for some luxury brands (Department of Homeland Security 2013; Thomas 2007). For those consumers who buy the genuine version of these brands, this increased prevalence of counterfeits has not gone unnoticed. In fact, many posters articulate both annoyance and frustration with the number of counterfeits in the marketplace and the “normalization” of counterfeit consumption.

“I see tons of fake Coach and [Louis Vuitton] around here. I would say 90% of the Coach bags I see out in public are fakes, it is that prevalent here. I even see fake Dooney bags (the zebra print ones). I have two coworkers that must have closets full of fake bags, because they carry 2 or 3 different fakes each week.” [Id: 89-3285, Year: 2010]

“People around me carry fakes all the time. I attend college and most of the girls carry fake bags- I see a lot of Coach, Chanel, and [Louis Vuitton]. On the rare occasion that I see someone with an authentic bag I’m pretty shocked! [Id: 89-2673, Year: 2010]

Posters often express a struggle with becoming a minority relative to counterfeit consumers. In particular, the identity signals provided to them through the consumption of brands like Chanel and Louis Vuitton (e.g., status, style, femininity) are directly undermined by the counterfeit doppelgänger that portrays itself as being “the real thing.” No longer seen as exclusive brands afforded by a select few, these luxury brands appear to have lost some of their identity signaling power (Berger and Heath 2007). Moreover, after having invested their “hard earned money” in these authentic identity signals, forum posters often come face-to-face with this loss of status signals as other consumers (not necessarily counterfeit owners) question the authenticity of their handbags because of this conflation of meaning between the genuine and the counterfeit.

“It does annoy me that some people wear fake [Louis Vuitton] because it seems to make most people assume everyone wears fakes. I am often asked if my mono Artsy and Monogram Shawl are real. I just say that I wouldn’t wear fakes.” [Id: 20-2669, Year: 2012]

“... here WE are the ones spending big bucks on luxury goods and it shows and then someone else walks up with a cheap (pale canvas, unusually long top handle speedy) bag and automatically people know that’s a fake, but then they turn to you and question [you] also.” [Id: 44-2152, Year: 2010]

As is evident in the above quotes, counterfeits pose an identity threat because they devalue the meaning of the genuine brand. As part of investing their money in “luxury” brand signals, posters expect to be rewarded with identity signals that convey status and fashion consciousness. However, the prevalence of counterfeits directly undermines the identity signaling power of the brand, thereby making the investment in “luxury” seem excessive and even “foolish.”

### **In Your Face “Wasteful Spending” as a Moral Threat**

A common theme that emerged from the analysis is the threat of being perceived as immoral because of “wasteful spending” on goods perceived as “frivolous” and “unnecessary.” The recurring theme of “being judged” for buying luxury handbags is particularly common in the data, illustrating how conspicuously branded goods often elicit unintentional moral associations that encourage other consumers to directly question the morality of the purchase decision:

“...What bothers me is people JUDGING ME when I carry my [Louis Vuitton] or Chanel as if I’m not good enough or how dare I spend that much on a bag. I sometimes feel embarrassed carrying it in front of my husband’s family...” [ID: 20-754, Year: 2013]

“...What I don’t appreciate is that when they notice that it’s real, they make loud comments so that I can hear it saying things like ‘what a materialistic bitch’ ... the mean

comments I've heard were long lectures about how I'm wasting my money on frivolous items..." [Id: 10-1126, Year: 2008]

As is evident from these quotes, "being judged" often results in feelings of guilt and embarrassment because spending money on luxury goods is perceived as unnecessary. In line with extant work on frugality and materialism (Henry 2010; Lastovicka et al. 1999; Silverstein and Fiske 2008), justifying spending on goods that are deemed "unnecessary" can be problematic and stressful because the consumers have to proclaim how they are worthy or "deserving" of such material acquisition. However, for luxury brand consumers, providing arguments that justify spending is often deemed too difficult or "not worth your time" because consumers in general, and close others in particular, cannot understand the value of a branded handbag and thus inevitably will judge its price to be "ridiculous" and "too expensive."

"Where my family is concerned, I tell them whatever they need to hear so I don't get grief from them. They are from a different era where spending \$50 on a purse seems expensive, I'd blow their minds if they knew I spent \$4000..." [Id: 52-3038, Year: 2013]

The need to justify spending is often lurking in social situations when others confront the luxury brand consumers about where they purchase their handbags and how much they cost. Many posters report that they are confronted and even "harassed" by others who demand that they justify their spending on luxury branded handbags (e.g., "how could you spend so much money on a handbag?"). Sometimes, such confrontations are embedded in suggestions for alternative spending, such as travel or social experiences (e.g., taking friends or close others to restaurants). However, more common suggestions include consumption that is considered to be inherently more "moral," such as donating money to charities:

“I actually had a complete stranger (who was wearing a fake version of my bag) tell me quite loudly in the middle of a grocery store that I was a horrible person for spending so much money on a useless item. She asked me how I could live with myself knowing that the money I spent on my bag could be put to good use at a charity.” [Id: 103-2970, Year: 2007]

Consumption has been described as “in essence a moral matter” (Wilk 2001, p. 246) and, as illustrated in the above quotes, luxury brand consumers are frequently faced with having to reconcile the apparent paradox of higher social status and lower moral status as a consequence of their choice to buy luxury brands. Hence, in addition to carrying legitimate status signals (Berger and Ward 2010, Han et al. 2010), luxury brands may also carry moral identity signals that frame the consumer as selfish and immoral due to associations of “wasteful spending.” Importantly, as will be discussed subsequently, such negative moral identity signals may be further enhanced by the prevalence of counterfeits in the marketplace.

### **Counterfeits as a “Moral” Alternative**

The loss of identity signaling power is often revealed in social interactions with counterfeit consumers who emphasize that genuine-item luxury brand consumers are “wasting their money” because they could (and should) have purchased the counterfeit version that “looks almost the same” and “costs a lot less.” In this regard, counterfeit consumers can portray themselves as savvier because they have realized obvious bargains, whereas genuine-item consumers are perceived as “foolish” and “wasteful” for purchasing their handbags at an authorized retail store. Posters often share their struggle providing a rationale for why the genuine version is a better choice:

“...I have found myself in conversations about designer handbags where people have said it’s silly to pay the high prices for the genuine ones when you can get fakes that look

exactly the same for much less, and most of the time they believe the quality of the fakes is good saying something like “I’ve had a fake [Louis Vuitton] for years and it’s still really good.” I end up feeling like these people must think I’m stupid buying the real thing and I feel stupid not being able to say why the real thing is better.” [Id: 3-1165, Year: 2010]

A focal concern for luxury brand consumers is the attributions others make of them for choosing the genuine version over the counterfeit. Not only are luxury brand consumers questioned for spending money on high-end, expensive brands, they are also perceived as unnecessarily rejecting counterfeits as a viable consumption alternative:

“My sister-in-law asked me once where I got my bag. I told her at the [Louis Vuitton] store in Chicago. She said- Oh, it’s real? I said- Yeah. Then she goes on to say how she would never spend that much on a bag. I know she was just jealous so I didn’t argue with her. I just told her that I deserve to spend my money on what makes me happy.” [Id: 40-703, Year: 2007]

As is evident in this quote, in interaction with close others, the forum posters often seek to emphasize how they deserve to spend their money on luxury brands (e.g., “they make me happy”). However, the prevalence of counterfeits complicates such justifications because counterfeits are often perceived to be viable alternatives to the genuine version of the brand. As previously reviewed, acquisition of material goods, and in particular, luxury brands, has long carried immoral associations, such as narcissism and selfishness (Veblen 1899). However, especially for lower and middle class consumers, the negative power of such stigmatized traits appears to have been outweighed by a desire to being included in the marketplace (“keep up with the Joneses”) and to maintain an image of success, even in economic downturns (Ordabayeva and Chandon 2010). As counterfeits become seen as an affordable alternative to such status acquisition, the genuine version of the brand appears to have lost some of its buffer against

negative materialistic associations. Thus, although counterfeits are illegally produced and are often linked to criminal activities (Thomas 2007), it is the genuine-item luxury brand consumers who increasingly are feeling guilty about their consumption. Moreover, although previous consumer movement research illustrates the tensions between “bountiful consumption” and “self-constraint” (Henry 2010, p. 671; Luedicke et al. 2010), the luxury brand consumer is not faced with the moral decision of choosing one brand over the other (e.g., Hummer vs. Prius), but forced to decide between the genuine version, which carries negative associations related to materialism, and the counterfeit version, which is an illegally produced doppelgänger. The recurring theme of “being judged” for the decision to buy the genuine version, rather than the counterfeit, is very prevalent in the data, thus highlighting how counterfeits are seen as a viable and even a more “moral” consumption alternative. Hence, the prevalence of counterfeits serves to further undermine the moral status of the luxury brand consumer.

### **Movement Mobilization: Rallying Around the Moral Threat**

Social movements are formed by individuals who are faced with a similar moral threat, perceived injustice, and/or exclusion from a dominant ideology or market (Gamson 2001; Sandikci and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Snow and McAdam 2000). This shared threat shapes the collective identity of the movement and the subsequent “call to action” (Snow and Benford 1988). Importantly, movement mobilization serves an important function for consumers who want to change the circumstances of their moral status in society (Snow and Benford 1992). Research using online community or discussion forum data often find evidence of such cause-related collective identity (Muñiz and Schau 2005; Luedicke 2010; Ward and Ostrom 2006). Although not necessarily officially labeled and marketed as a social movement by

the collective, online consumption forums and communities may serve to connect consumers who share the same problem, threat, or grievances (Ward and Ostrom 2006; Wilson and Peterson 2002).

In this research, the online forum is important for consciousness-raising (Hirsch 1990) because the luxury brand consumers can share their experiences related to counterfeits and the issues surrounding stigmatization of luxury consumption. In particular, the prevalence of counterfeits compromises the luxury brand consumer's identity by providing an "affordable" consumption alternative that consequently carries less negative associations. Further, the moral threat posed by the denigration of the "sacred genuine" and accusations of "wasteful spending" that serve as the foundation for collective identity construction as these luxury brand consumers share stories related to feeling guilty, embarrassed, immoral, and ambivalent about the identity signals conveyed through their consumption. Importantly, the opposition of the "sacred" genuine version and the "profane" counterfeit serves as a catalyst for involvement in the forum and for mobilizing resources to change the status quo. In particular, in order to reinstate the value of the genuine brand and to legitimate luxury consumption, these luxury brand consumers actively strive to discredit and undermine the moral status of the counterfeit consumer through collective moral framing of counterfeit consumption.

## **CONSTRUCTING THE MORAL FRAMEWORK:**

### **COLLECTIVE MORAL FRAMING OF COUNTERFEIT CONSUMPTION**

Somewhat paradoxically, the existence of the counterfeit doppelgänger provides luxury brand consumers with an opportunity to defend their moral status. The qualitative analysis of

thread topics and posts reveals that posters engage in collective framing of counterfeit consumption to attain legitimacy for their ownership of luxury brands. In other words, the counterfeit becomes the target of framing efforts because it serves the collective agenda of undermining the negative moral associations of luxury brand consumption. Ultimately, the collective framing effort undertaken by the forum, as a social movement, is primarily focused on moralizing counterfeit consumption.

As discussed in the method section, the qualitative frame analysis revealed that forum posters engage in three collective framing activities: (1) product framing (i.e., framing of the counterfeit product), (2) person framing (i.e., framing the counterfeit consumer) and (3) context framing (i.e., framing criminal aspects of counterfeit consumption). My quantitative content analysis focused on these three framing activities, using a dictionary of words (Table 2) that was created based on the qualitative analysis. The overall results of the content analysis are presented in Table 3. In line with previous work on legitimation and framing (Humphreys 2010, Humphreys and Thompson 2014), the content analysis results are provided to support the qualitative analysis and to examine frame content over time. Thus, the specific findings of the content analysis are presented in conjunction with the qualitative findings.

In the next section, I examine the content of each of the three collective framing activities (i.e., product, person, and context framing) and how they reinforce the assertion that counterfeit consumption is an immoral consumption practice. In line with previous legitimation research (Humphreys 2010), I also consider how the frame content has evolved over time by comparing post content in earlier (i.e., 2006-2008) years to post content in later years (i.e., 2012-2014).



## **Why is Counterfeit Consumption Immoral? Constructing the Moral Framework**

The qualitative frame analysis of forum threads revealed three frames: (1) “Counterfeits are Inferior Products,” (2) “Counterfeit Consumers are Antagonists,” and (3) “Counterfeiting is a Crime.” Each of these frames supports that counterfeit consumption is an immoral consumption practice by framing different “moral” aspects of counterfeit consumption, highlighting its detriment to consumers, brands, and to society in general.

### ***Product Framing: “Counterfeits are Inferior Products”***

Given the many social confrontations with counterfeit users and those who proclaim that counterfeits are “just as good” as the genuine versions of the brand, it is not surprising that much of the framing within the forum is devoted to highlighting the inferiority of the counterfeit product relative to the genuine product. Hence, the posters actively strive to frame the counterfeit handbag as being inferior to the genuine handbag. To accomplish this effectively, posters frame the counterfeit as having negative product/brand attributes and the genuine version as having positive product/brand attributes. Negative product/brand attributes are mentioned in 10% of posts and by 18.9% of posters; these posts often include references to the lower quality and the “cheap” look of the counterfeit:

“...They just smell like PVC!! We can close our eyes but we can't close our nose... Whenever I see a fake it's always a struggle for me not to yell FAKE FAKE!! And it definitely makes me think differently about the person, are they silly and just don't know the difference, or are they proud of their “bargain”?! Either way, screams cheap.”[Id: 80-2215, Year: 2008]

“...They're tacky, they fall apart too quickly, the proportions are wrong, and they're an insult to the real thing because they're so effing ugly...” [Id: 4-3045, Year: 2010]

In many cases, as is evident in these quotes, some functional aspect of the counterfeit (e.g., PVC material) triggers an affective assessment of why counterfeits are inferior. Such functional aspects also include references to low quality materials, chemical smell, or the handbag having “wrong proportions.” This framing is important because it helps to emphasize that the counterfeit is not the same as the genuine version. Hence, through this framing, the counterfeit becomes an inferior copy that signals “tackiness” and “cheapness” rather than a bargain.

References to positive product/brand attributes of the genuine item are also common; 10.6% of posts and 19.1% of posters made reference to positive product/brand attributes focused on showcasing how the genuine version is a far more superior to the counterfeit. In particular, references often include how “handbag” attributes, such as leather quality, stitching, lining, and hardware, contribute to the consumption experience:

“For me it is complete passion! Passion for beautiful craftsmanship. Passion for the scent of gorgeous Italian leather. Passion for stitching and lining and hardware. I do not buy for others, I buy what makes my heart swoon! And the quest for what styles fits me perfectly, what leather feels the best to my touch... well yes, it is addicting...” [Id: 34-2382, Year: 2012]

“...I carry LV for me because I love the craftsmanship of their purses...the way they sit on your arm or shoulder...the way the canvas/leather and brass hardware feel on your fingertips...the perfectly hand sewn seams...ahhhh...I could go on and on.” [Id: 20-3957, Year: 2011]

By referring to the handcrafted materials and the “feel” of the bag, the posters can highlight how the counterfeit lacks the experiential elements necessary for a “true” brand experience. Hence, one cannot understand the brand without consuming the genuine version.

Importantly, the negative framing of the counterfeit and the positive framing of the genuine version are often carried out simultaneously. The content analysis revealed that 1.8% of all posts and 6.6% of posters made references to both negative and positive product/brand attributes. Thus, in line with Belk et al.'s (1989) assertion that the sacred is defined in relation to the profane, the superiority of the genuine version is often best showcased through direct comparison with the counterfeit. Such comparisons may even be carried out by physically comparing the genuine version to the counterfeit. For example, one poster brought her genuine Louis Vuitton bag to work to show her co-worker (who uses the counterfeit version) the difference in quality:

“...I showed her the difference in the purses starting with her FAKE vachetta handles (they were glued and had red plastic like closures at the handle tabs) and showed her where the handles will probably come apart and the inside...that fake suede lining... and the fake date stamp under a crappy d-ring...” [Id: 31-3024, Year: 2008]

As is evident from this quote, direct comparisons often require specific knowledge about the genuine version, such as how it is made, its origin, and quality of the leather and stitching. By sharing such product-related information, the forum posters can create a database of information that members of the collective can use to more effectively highlight the inferiority of the counterfeit relative to the genuine version.

Interestingly, an analysis of forum posts over time revealed that references to the positive attributes of genuine products have remained relatively constant at around 11% when comparing earlier (2006-2008) and later threads (2012-2014) ( $\chi^2 = .19$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .66$ ). In contrast, references to negative product attributes significantly decreased from 11.7% (2006-2008) to 6.9% (2012-2014) ( $\chi^2 = 45.52$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, it appears negative product framing,

although still prominent, has become less of a focus to the forum posters over time (see Figure 2). As will be discussed in the next section, this may be attributed partly to the evolving nature of the person framing activities in the forum and the perceived need and ability to successfully “educate” counterfeit consumers about the inferiority of counterfeits.

### ***Person Framing: “Counterfeit Consumers are Antagonists”***

The second frame is primarily focused on framing counterfeit consumers as antagonists. This person framing strategy constitutes 11.7% of all posts, and 20.1% of all posters make references to negative personal (counterfeit user) characteristics. Specifically, person framing is articulated through references to the counterfeit consumer as being: (1) undesirable, (2) ignorant and/or (3) immoral.

Posters often refer to counterfeit consumers as having some undesirable personal characteristics, such as being rude, shallow, vulgar, and “pretending that they are someone they are not.” The content analysis revealed that 5.4% of all posts (10.6% of posters) involve some reference to undesirable or unpleasant personal characteristics. In particular, counterfeit consumers are often framed as jealous individuals who are in desperate pursuit of the status and style attained by the genuine luxury brand consumers:

“...those with the fakes are the ones who are jealous of those who are toting the real bags. That’s why they are carrying fakes. Because they want to project an image that they CAN afford bags that cost X amount. But it’s just an illusion...” [Id: 19-2934, Year: 2007]

Previous literature on identity signaling (Berger and Ward 2010) supports that a focal concern for consumers is the identity threat stemming from illegitimate brand users poaching what is considered to be identity-specific brand signals. For forum posters, such poaching is often

defined as a purposeful act where the counterfeit consumer strives to attain the identity signals of the genuine version of the brand at any cost, often actively “flaunting” their handbags “as if they were the real thing.”

“...What bothers many people is when people (whether poor or rich or whatever) go around flaunting an obviously fake handbag, which is an obvious sign that they’re trying to show off and fool others that they’re carrying the real deal, when they’re really not. It’s one thing to just carry around a fake bag, but to flaunt it around and act like you’re above everyone else because of it is another.” [Id: 11-3971, Year: 2008]

Posters also make attributions about counterfeit consumers being as naïve and oblivious to the meaning of counterfeits and unaware that they are using them. Specifically, 5.3% of all posts and 10.1% of posters made references to such “ignorant” personal characteristics.

Interestingly, these “ignorant” counterfeit consumers are sometimes deemed “less guilty” because of their ignorance:

“What about these people who don’t know that they are buying fake things? Let’s say they are here as tourists and see a nice bag sold on a street and buy it just because they liked it and price is right, not because they intentionally wanted to own fake designer bags. I know many people who have no clue about designer brands. I know that not knowing the law isn’t an excuse but I can’t find these people as guilty as the ones who knew what they were doing.” [Id: 22-4150, Year: 2012]

Nonetheless, the ignorant counterfeit user appears to be no less aggravating, as posters express frustration with these “ignorant sheep” who are taken advantage of by the counterfeit sellers who recognize their innocence and lack of knowledge about luxury brands.

“... many of these ‘fake purse’ buyers should just quit being ‘innocent and ignorant sheep’ to be led by the nose of these mobsters and should just quit letting these mobsters ‘milk’ them of their hard earned money (like taking candy from a baby)” [Id: 10-2336, Year: 2008]

As is evident from this quote, although ignorant counterfeit consumers are unaware of the moral implications of counterfeit consumption, because they are (unintentionally) associating themselves with “mobsters,” they are still contributing to the moral problem of counterfeits. Hence, although perhaps seen as “less guilty,” they are still tainted by their “association with criminals.”

Finally, posters also portray counterfeit consumers as immoral individuals who support “child labor” and “terrorism.” The content analysis revealed that 2.2% of all posts and 4.2% of all posters made some reference to what is prototypically defined as immoral personal characteristics (Aquino and Reed 2002), such as lack of moral character, being unethical or deceptive. The immoral characteristics of counterfeit consumers are often emphasized in terms of “lack of caring” for the welfare of others and a general “lack of moral character,” as illustrated here:

“...What gets me are the people that actually take pleasure in buying fakes like they're putting one over on the rest of us. I had a friend whose DH bought her some fake Chanel's in NY, and she was so tickled by his adventure into the criminal underworld...”  
[Id: 67-3006, Year: 2010]

Because purchasing counterfeits is not illegal in the United States, posters often emphasize how those purchasing counterfeits are facilitating crimes and endangering the welfare of others. This framing strategy is particularly useful for situations when posters are asked to justify their spending on luxury handbags because they can directly refute the argument that counterfeit consumers are “better people” because they choose not to spend as much money.

“[Buying counterfeits is] dishonest, and it's illegal. I suppose some people like to look at it in shades of grey... But it's still against the law. It just is. It's trademark infringement

and it does show a lack of character. It just kind of skirts the moral and ethical code.” [Id: 22-767, Year: 2012]

Taken together, the person framing of the counterfeit consumers as undesirable, ignorant, and immoral serves the purpose of showcasing how the counterfeit consumer contributes to the moral problem of counterfeit consumption. Person framing helps to reinforce that counterfeit consumption is immoral by highlighting how counterfeit consumers are antagonists. As shown in Figure 3, the nature of person framing activities has evolved over time. Specifically, while undesirable personal characteristics have remained constant at around 5% ( $\chi^2 = 1.91$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p = .38$ ), ignorant consumer characteristics have decreased in more recent years (6.2% in 2006-2008 vs. 4.6% in 2012-2014) ( $\chi^2 = 8.29$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and immoral personal characteristics have increased (1.8% in 2006-2008 vs. 3.7% in 2012-2014) ( $\chi^2 = 26.10$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, from 2006 to 2014, counterfeit users have predominantly been framed as unattractive and ignorant (though on the decline), and increasingly immoral. The increased focus on immoral characteristics is important because, consistent with extant social movement research (Polletta and Jasper 2001), this finding suggests that through continued emphasis on the “immoral” characteristics of the target for change (i.e., the counterfeit consumer), the posters can shift attention away from their own perceived “character flaw” (i.e., materialistic associations).

### ***Context Framing: “Counterfeiting is a Crime”***

In addition to product framing and person framing, forum posters also strive to more directly highlight the immorality of counterfeit consumption by emphasizing that counterfeiting is a crime that is connected to other crimes. In particular, the content analysis revealed 5.6% of posts are focused on crime and criminal activities. Interestingly, although counterfeiting-specific

crimes (e.g., copyright infringement) were mentioned in 2.6% of posts and by 4.5% of posters, a greater percentage of posts referred to more violent criminal activities, such as terrorism, trafficking, prostitution (3.8% of all posts and by 6.8% of posters). Examples include:

“Buying a counterfeit bag is supporting an industry rife with sweatshop labor and child labor violations.” [Id: 20-3552, Year: 2011]

“People may disagree or want to turn a blind eye, but besides the fact that fakes are tacky, ugly, and the most pathetic form of “wannabe” behavior on the planet, it supports terrorism, child labor, and organized crime.” [Id: 72-3159, Year: 2008]

“Very few people understand the links to child labor as well as terrorism in these fakes. It’s not just copyright infringement.” [Id: 7-3122, Year: 2008]

This practice of broadening the moral sphere is consistent with the strategic process of frame extension where a social movement strives to make the moral cause more appealing and encompassing by appealing to values and beliefs that have a broader appeal (Snow et al. 1986). By broadening the criminal associations of counterfeits, posters can link counterfeiting to crimes that are “obviously immoral,” thereby making even stronger arguments for why counterfeits are so detrimental to societal welfare. This frame extension strategy, however, is likely to have impact only when there is empirical credibility (Benford and Snow 2000), that is when, in this case, counterfeiting has been linked other crimes by reputable legal or government entities. Within the discussion forum, posters cite newspaper articles and reports from INTERPOL to substantiate the claims that counterfeiting supports organized networks of criminal activities. Such evidence is often used both to support the legitimacy of the main collective action frame (i.e., counterfeits are immoral) and to inspire individual action by reinforcing that “everyone can make a difference.” For example, one poster argues that just saying “counterfeit goods are illegal” is not a convincing argument, and goes on to bolster her post with additional evidence:



“...Here are a few more facts and some reading material in case there are some that want to learn about this epidemic. The FBI found evidence that the 1993 World Trade Center bombing was financed by counterfeit goods. Was the FBI overstating? I’m not making an argument here - I am going on well-documented facts. In case you would like to learn more about this epidemic, there are lots of articles. Even if an industry breeds the possibility of illegal activity, it does not mean that people are powerless. One person can chose to make a difference at any time, with the smallest of efforts. I guess another annoying thing about fakes is the apathy towards it by the uniformed...” [Id: 20-879, Year: 2012]

Not all posters find this evidence credible, and a heated debate among posters ensues, regarding the link between counterfeiting and terrorism. It is often the case that “well-documented facts” are discussed within the forum in reference to face-to-face encounters with a counterfeit user, or in relation to justifying owning the genuine version (vs. the counterfeit). Some forum posters appear to be ambivalent about the claimed influence of counterfeits in general, and counterfeit handbags in particular, on global criminal activities and terrorism. As a compromise, some posters choose to emphasize that counterfeits are part of the problem, but not the whole story:

“Yeah but to be honest I still find the connection between 9/11 and fake bags to be tenuous. Just because people want to assume that terrorists make money from illegal activities doesn’t mean we should include fake handbags in there. But as I said before, folks need to remember that many of the leaders of these terrorist organizations are extremely rich and it isn’t all through ill-gotten gains...” [Id: 4-3002, Year: 2010]

By advocating or relying on the “Counterfeiting is a Crime” frame, the forum participants can emphasize that counterfeit consumption should not be normatively legitimate (i.e., taken for granted as “normal”) because it lacks regulative legitimacy (i.e., it is illegal). Thus, emphasis on crime simultaneously highlights the importance of the moral cause while undermining the legitimacy of counterfeit consumption.

Interestingly, as shown in Figure 4, the proportion of posts that reference counterfeiting crime has remained relatively constant at 2-3% over time ( $\chi^2 = .57$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p = .75$ ). In contrast, posts referring to other, more violent crimes (e.g., terrorism, drug trade) have significantly decreased from 4.1% (2006-2008) to 3.2% (2012-2014 ( $\chi^2 = 4.10$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This is consistent with social movement research that suggests frame extension processes (in this case the broadening discussion related to more extreme crimes) may be more important in earlier stages of the movement to anchor the moral cause in auxiliary values and interests to broaden its appeal (Snow et al. 1986).

### **APPLYING THE MORAL FRAMEWORK: PRESCRIBING AND NEGOTIATING ACTION**

The three collective framing activities (i.e., product, person, and context framing) serve to reinforce the main action frame of counterfeit consumption as an immoral consumption practice. These framing activities are important because they help posters articulate specific and credible arguments about what makes counterfeit consumption immoral. However, as argued by Snow et al. (1986) and Benford and Snow (2000), framing is not only important to the credibility of the movement, but also an essential precursor to movement mobilization. Indeed, the qualitative analysis revealed that the forum relies on the three frames to prescribe appropriate actions to change the status quo. In the next two sections, I show how posters use these frames to prescribe specific actions that will “make a difference” and how they collectively resolve various social and moral conflicts that posters encountered as a consequence of their luxury brand consumption.

## **Prescribing Actions to “Make a Difference”**

Framing processes are important to not only define the problem and its importance, but also to prescribe actions that will “make a difference” (Goodwin et al. 2001; Benford and Snow 2000; Melucci 1996). For forum participants, definition of appropriate actions is particularly important because of the many social dramas they encounter in their role as advocate for the genuine version of a brand. The thread analysis revealed three different, but related, types of prescriptive actions: (1) evangelizing, (2) confronting, and (3) lecturing. Each serves a unique role in terms of applying the moral frames.

*Evangelizing* is concerned with highlighting the value or “singing the praises” of the genuine, and is therefore primarily linked with product framing. In the brand community literature, brand evangelism has been conceptualized as an impression management practice where brand community members act as “altruistic emissaries and ambassadors of good will” to mitigate stigmas associated with consumption of a specific brand (Schau et al. 2009, p. 34). As such, evangelizing practices are closely related to the justifications consumers make for devoting time and energy to brand-related missions. For posters, evangelizing practices are often focused on emphasizing the favorable attributes of the genuine version of the brand by direct comparison to the “lesser quality” counterfeit. Thus, evangelizing appears to be most easily accomplished through a “show-and-tell” session with the counterfeit consumer:

“I would allow her to touch and look at your real LVs in comparison to her fake...” [Id: 70-1135, Year: 2010]

“... I showed her the difference in the purses starting with her FAKE Vachetta handles (they were glued and had red plastic like closures at the handle tabs) and showed her where the handles will probably come apart and the inside...that fake suede lining... and the fake date stamp under a crappy d-ring...” [Id: 30-3024, Year: 2008]

“...Sitting next to her compare the two, touch and feel... Get her to understand the quality is one thing but showing the history is another... I sit there with her and tell her full history to why it's such luxurious piece.” [Id: 55-234, Year: 2012]

Evangelizing can also showcase the value of the genuine version, while simultaneously undermining the value of the counterfeit. One poster shares advice on how to advocate for the genuine product:

“...Focus on the positive. 1. There are fantastic pre-loved bargains to be had at X Y Z consignment stores. 2. Designer outlets have bags that are the real thing for often half the price but all of the ‘power’. 3. There ain’t nothing like the real thing baby: better to have one fabulous bag for 5 years than 5 OK bags year after year. 4. People that someone might want to impress can tell real from fake and those that can't don't care anyway.” [Id: 3-1287, Year: 2010]

As this quote illustrates, forum participants often carry an arsenal of arguments to proclaim the superiority of the genuine version. In fact, a recurring theme is to “always be prepared” for an altercation with a counterfeit consumer or a “judgmental” or “jealous” friend/family member. Knowing what product attributes are of “higher quality” and, as exemplified in the above quote, where to buy used genuine brands (often referred to as “pre-loved” handbags) becomes central to articulating a credible argument or justification for choosing to buy the genuine version rather than the counterfeit (Benford and Snow 2000).

*Confrontation* is mostly described as a way to “preempt an attack” from those who judge the spending on luxury brands as “wasteful” and who consider counterfeits to be viable and moral alternative to such spending. Confrontation appears to be particularly linked with person framing tactics as it is often seen as a necessary action when encountering the unattractive and immoral counterfeit owner who “is showing off the cheap version of a masterpiece:”

“...we have people parading this fake crap around like it's something special. Showing off the cheap version of a masterpiece... That makes me mad. I've hollered at a few ladies before, telling them all kinds of things to make them realize what a wrong doing it is to be carrying fake designer bags... [Id: 14-4223, Year: 2007]

Interestingly, forum participants are often ambivalent about the usefulness of confrontation and whether or not the benefits will outweigh the costs of breaking social norms. Some forum participants prefer a confrontation-avoidance strategy where counterfeit consumers are “terrible role models” that should be ignored, as a social statement, because they are not worth the effort of confrontation. In some ways, this strategy also serves to highlight the “character flaw” of the counterfeit consumer:

“I am pretty on the fence as far as calling out and shaming people who wear fakes... What kills me is when people are proud of their fakes. It's a sleazy attitude and instead of showing sound financial priorities like they might think, bragging about it showcases their propensity to cheat, lie, and be overall terrible role models. I'll happily skip over those people as friends and colleagues...” [Id: 20-2717, Year: 2012]

Overall, confrontation appears to be a satisfying action because it allows the posters to “make their voice heard” and to further distance themselves from the immoral counterfeit consumer (i.e., “this is why I am different from you”). However, as is apparent from the above example, confrontation is also the most socially awkward strategy because it requires the poster to directly make their opinions known to the counterfeit consumer.

*Lecturing* is often prescribed as an appropriate and necessary tactic to more directly “make a difference” in the name of the moral cause. Lecturing involves the sharing of information and evidence related to what the crime of counterfeiting, and is therefore a particularly important action related to the crime framing. Specifically, lecturing often emphasizes that counterfeiting is linked to other crimes that carry more “immoral” connotations,

such as trafficking, drug trade, and terrorism. In particular, posters argue for relaying such information, regardless of how well it is likely to be perceived, and how uncomfortable it makes the forum posters. The mantra is that this information should “not be hidden” from the counterfeit consumer “under any circumstances.”

“...If people don't want to hear it, fine...but the truth should never be hidden under any circumstance! If people want to hide their heads in the sand, that is their business. It's my business to mention that fakes are a problem.” [Id: 88-3016, Year: 2010]

Not surprisingly, forum participants often describe relaying information through lecturing as “uncomfortable” and “not well received,” because it directly violates social norms that dictate the nature of the conversations. A less direct approach suggested by some forum participants is to offer up some information to encourage questions, thereby creating more of a two-way discussion than a traditional “lecture.”

“...I think it's one thing to say, ‘I don't buy fakes because I prefer the real thing and because of their crappy quality, impact on the designer goods market, and unethical labor practices,’ and answer questions if anyone has them, and it's another thing to lecture people and tell them they should or shouldn't do this or that.” [Id: 3-140, Year: 2010]

Taken together, evangelizing, confronting, and lecturing are deemed necessary and legitimate actions to be undertaken in pursuit of improved moral status and “making a difference.” Moreover, a within-thread analysis of threads devoted to prescribing actions and telling stories about carrying out the prescribed actions ( $n_{\text{threads}} = 54$ ,  $n_{\text{posts}} = 3134$ ), accomplished by dividing each thread into three parts (i.e., beginning, middle, end), revealed that action prescription also appears to facilitate collective identity construction in the forum, as evidenced by an increasing use of words related to first person plural (i.e., us, we) when

comparing posts in the beginning of the threads to posts in the end of the thread (10.3% in beginning vs. 13.5% in end,  $\chi^2 = 5.10$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). As argued by Benford and Snow (2000), collective identity construction in a social movement is not only shaped by collective framing activities, but also by collectively delineating appropriate actions that can be carried out by movement adherents in the name of the moral cause. As one poster excitedly decreed:

“It’s up to us to change the world, one handbag at a time.” [Id: 15-3655, Year: 2007]

However, as will be discussed subsequently, prescribed actions are often contested and negotiated as posters face anxiety provoking social norm conflicts.

### **Negotiating Action through Story-Telling and Advice Seeking**

The discussion forum provides a platform for interested luxury brand consumers to collectively suggest and provide alternative actions depending on the particular counterfeit context (i.e., how is the counterfeit involved) or social context (i.e., who is involved in the dilemma). Forum posters can then better fine-tune and target the general prescribed actions (i.e. evangelizing, confronting, and lecturing) to different types of social encounters with counterfeits. Some threads are scenario-based and involve story-telling or advice-seeking, or a combination of both. Although some of these threads include more general stories related to encounters with counterfeits or counterfeit users, most are primarily focused on solving a particular forum poster’s problem. Interestingly, most of these problem-focused threads follow the same pattern; (1) scenario/problem, (2) advice or possible solution, and (3) resolution (i.e., what actually happened). For example, one forum poster received a counterfeit diaper bag as a gift from her mother-in-law:

“...I know I have to smile and say thank you, and tell her how much I love it, but what then? Ugh... I hate being put in this position. I don’t want to throw it away or give it away, but I also don’t want to be seen with a fake bag.” [Id: 11-1063, Year: 2007]

In response to this dilemma, forum posters shared several possible resolutions including: (1) buying the genuine-version of the same bag (expensive and deceptive), (2) only use it around the mother-in-law (no social norm conflict but morally uncomfortable), (3) spill grape juice all over it so that you have an excuse to throw it away (deception) or (4) tell her that you had to have it repaired and the retail store told you it was a counterfeit and had to confiscate it (make her feel guilty). As in most advice-seeking threads, the original forum poster shared her final decision and her rationale:

“...I don’t want to throw it away, just in case she asks about it. I am pretty sure that she knows it’s fake ....she wears fakes all the time, and when I buy her real Coach she says something like- I can get this bag for only \$10. We don’t get along, and I think she’d start talking smack if she knew I threw away a present she gave me. For now, I guess it needs to stay in the closet... and maybe bring it out when she comes over...” [Id: 11-1063, Year: 2007]

The idea of “contested” moral frames is prevalent in social movement research and may involve responses to new threats or new information that may diminish the credibility of existing frames and actions (Benford and Snow 2000). Consistent with this perspective, the data suggest that as participants in this forum are being engaged and helping each other solve moral or social dilemmas, they are also collectively defining what are considered important problems to be solved by the movement and simultaneously constructing solutions to cope with new identity-relevant threats.



## **MORAL BRAND ENGAGEMENT: LEGITIMATION OF LUXURY BRAND CONSUMPTION**

In this research, I examine how luxury brand consumers strive to legitimate their consumption through moral brand engagement. In line with previous work on moralistic identity projects and legitimation (Luedicke et al. 2010), my findings support that consumers who experience threat of stigmatization often attribute moral value to consumption practices that align with their ideological beliefs. Following the suggestion of Johnston (2002), the moral brand engagement framework is presented in a frame schema (Figure 5) to showcase the linkages between different frames and how they each influence prescribed actions (see also Gerhards and Rucht 1992). As can be seen in Figure 5, the collective action frame revolves around framing counterfeit consumption as immoral. By engaging in framing of the counterfeit product, the counterfeit consumer, and the counterfeit context, the forum posters provide support for their assertion that counterfeit consumption is an immoral consumption practice.

Previous work on social movements has shown that individuals often join movements as a consequence of being the object of stigmatization (Goffman 1963; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Kaplan and Liu 2000; Snow and Benford 1992). Collective strategies are particularly effective because they allow stigmatized individuals to effectively articulate how their actions are “desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p. 574). Moreover, as noted by Kaplan and Liu (2000, p. 218), movement mobilization may help stigmatized individuals not only to manage their stigmatization, but also to actively reject and transform the standards that uphold the stigmatization because “if the individual adopts a new system of values, previously stigmatized

personal attributes now become the basis for self-approval.” Thus, the consumer can simultaneously embrace a new value system while rejecting those standards that contributed to the perceived character flaw.

For luxury brand consumers, stigmatization stems primarily from the many negative connotations of “luxury” and, in particular, the exhibition of wealth conveyed in through the brands’ status signals. Importantly, for the specific group of luxury brand consumers studied in this research, the online forum provides an outlet for sharing experiences related to this threat of stigmatization and an opportunity to collectively develop strategies and rally around the loss of moral status due to negative materialistic associations and the “profane” counterfeit doppelgänger. The analysis of forum threads and posts reveal that luxury brand consumption carries negative moral association related to “wasteful spending” and that counterfeits contribute to such negative associations by providing consumers with what is perceived as an “affordable alternative.” Moreover, forum posters report that they are berated and harassed by counterfeit consumers and close others who perceive luxury brand consumption to be frivolous and even immoral. Importantly, the prevalence of counterfeits has become the foundation for collective identity in the forum because it provides its users with a common purpose and a strategic agenda. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, although the prevalence of counterfeits may serve to further undermine the moral status of the luxury brand consumer, it also provides the luxury brand consumer with an opportunity to directly combat the threat of stigmatization and (re)gain legitimacy.

Specifically, to attain legitimacy for their own consumption of luxury brands, forum posters engage in collective framing of counterfeit consumption as immoral. The frame analysis revealed three frames that support this moralization process (see Figure 5). First, counterfeit

products are framed as inferior to undermine the notion that counterfeits are a viable alternative to luxury brands. Second, the counterfeit consumers are framed as antagonists through emphasis on undesirable, ignorant, and immoral personal characteristics. Third and finally, forum posters strive to highlight the immoral aspects of counterfeits by framing counterfeiting as a crime that is linked to other crimes, such as terrorism, drug-trade, and trafficking. Taken together, by focusing on product, person, and societal welfare, these three frames provide the luxury brand consumer with a comprehensive framework that supports that counterfeits are immoral and that the genuine version is a better and more moral option than a counterfeit.

Moreover, as depicted in Figure 5, although interrelated, these three frames are linked to different sets of prescribed actions that encourage individual posters to take action and “make a difference.” Product framing is the foundation for brand evangelizing where luxury brand consumers preach inferiority of the counterfeit and the meaning of consuming the genuine version. In contrast, person framing is primarily linked to confronting counterfeit users about their consumption to “make them see reason.” Finally, context framing is primarily linked to lecturing, where the luxury brand consumer can share information about the moral detriments of counterfeits and its linkages with criminal activities. Although these three types of prescribed actions are preferred, the forum also provides opportunity for individual users to share stories and seek advice from one another, thereby collectively creating targeted actions that account for various social norm conflicts and moral dilemmas.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research builds on previous research on “moralistic identity work” (Luedicke et al. 2010, p. 1017) by examining how consumers collectively frame alternative consumption as immoral to attain legitimacy for their own consumption practices. In contrast to extant work that has illustrated how consumers rely on specific brands, through acquisition or opposition, to signal their ideological beliefs (Kates 2004; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Varman and Belk 2009), my research examines the collective strategies of consumers who seek to defend their moral status by widening the perceived gap between two alternative versions of the same brand, the “sacred” genuine version from the “profane” counterfeit. In particular, contrary to research on negotiated inclusion in the marketplace, as in the case of the “frustrated fatshionistas” depicted by Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), my research captures the struggle of a group of consumers who have lost legitimacy and moral status due to an alternative consumption form; counterfeit consumption, that is seen as carrying less negative materialistic associations and that is often described as an opportunity to “get the same for less.” Hence, the perceived “character flaw” of the luxury brand consumer is directly attributed to its brand consumption and negotiation for inclusion is therefore also directly dependent on the relative moral status of the brand. However, in contrast to the brand-oppositional cases portrayed in previous work (e.g., Prius vs. Hummer; Porsche vs. Porsche Cayenne), my research examines consumers’ reactions to a brand “doppelgänger” that is receiving praise for being similar, rather than different, from the original brand. These luxury brand consumers have to reclaim their brand signals and defend their moral status by actively differentiating the original from the counterfeit, often by directly showcasing

differences through show-and-tell or by providing evidence of the “violent” criminal nature of counterfeit production and selling practices.

My research offers important insights to previous research on counterfeit consumption and, in particular, the effects of counterfeits on genuine-item consumers. Although the characteristics of the counterfeit consumer and motivation for consuming counterfeits is well documented (Bloch et al. 1993; Phau and Teah 2009; Wilcox et al. 2009), surprisingly little research exists on the impact of counterfeits on genuine-item consumers. As noted by Commuri (2009, 87), “the genuine-item buyer is seldom considered to have experienced loss of utility when counterfeits swell, as if to imply that these consumers have received a suitable trade with the receipt of the physical good.” However, as supported by the findings of this research and Commuri’s work, luxury brand consumption is inherently dependent on the identity signaling power afforded to the consumer as a consequence of their brand ownership. Thus, when the prevalence of counterfeits undermines this identity signaling power, the genuine-item consumer is inevitably affected through loss of status. Hence, the value of the “genuine” is embedded in *both* ownership and use. Moreover, in contrast to Commuri’s research which is primarily focused on the individual genuine-item consumer’s brand relationship strategies as a consequence of counterfeits (e.g., abandonment of the brand or emphasis of pioneering brand use), my research examines genuine-item consumers’ collective strategies for coping with loss of valuable identity signals. In particular, by engaging in collective framing of the counterfeit product and the counterfeit consumer, genuine-item consumers can reclaim the status meanings of the brand and simultaneously undermine the value of the counterfeit. This collective strategy appears to be particularly effective when abandonment of the brand is not deemed possible, such as when there is a particularly strong affective tie to the brand or the specific product (i.e., the handbag is

sacred) or when the investment in this identity signal is seen as too large for abandonment (i.e., the perceived sunk cost is too high). By collectively framing counterfeits, the genuine-item consumers become armed with a collection of “credible” arguments and a range of suitable actions to directly undermine the status of the counterfeit product and even preempt attacks from counterfeit consumers.

As my findings showcase, the battle between genuine-item luxury brand consumers and counterfeit consumers is full of contradictions and moral ambiguities. Counterfeiting carries distinct moral associations related to crime and inauthenticity, something that the luxury brand consumers who post to this forum are clearly capitalizing on in their attempts to legitimate their own consumption. However, luxury brand consumption clearly carries its own moral connotations of being wasteful and shallow. The narratives of these luxury brand consumers clearly reflect a struggle of trying to reconcile these contradictions by emphasizing some and undermining others. Interestingly, it appears that counterfeit consumption may be a blessing in disguise as it provides the luxury brand consumer with an opportunity to frame a “villain” that can shift attention away from the immoral materialistic associations of luxury consumption. Hence, counterfeit consumption is the scapegoat needed to effectively legitimize luxury brand consumption as a consumption practice.

Finally, my research contributes to research on materialism (Richins and Dawson 1992; Richins 1994) and, in particular, stigmatized materialism (Van Boven et al. 2010). Specifically, I show how some luxury brand consumers negotiate the “character flaws” afforded to them through consumption of luxury brands, either by purchasing an affordable alternative (as in the case of the counterfeit consumer) or by emphasizing the moral detriment of that affordable alternative (as in the case of the genuine-item consumer). Interestingly, the idea of counterfeits as

a materialistic “neutral” in the sense of not evoking materialistic associations also corresponds to the shifting trends in the legitimization of luxury consumption and the emphasis on being a savvy shopper. In the 1980s, consumers wanted to share with others how much they spent on a product, but now it has become more fashionable to talk about how much you have saved on your luxury purchases (Moore 2005; Thomas 2007). Counterfeits fit easily into this “savings-template” because they are made to look the same as the genuine product; often even made with the same type of material and using perfectly replicated logos, clasps, and tags. Thus, it appears that counterfeits may provide a consumption alternative that reframes luxury as frugal and sensible, a contradiction not so easily embraced with traditional luxury brand consumption. As is evident throughout the postings, many counterfeit consumers “brag” about how much they saved by buying the counterfeit version of the handbag, further encouraging the genuine-item luxury brand consumer to find proof that the counterfeit is both physically and morally inferior. The frame analysis showcases how posters purposefully string together different frames related to the product or brand (i.e., counterfeits are inferior products), consumer characteristics (i.e., counterfeit consumers as antagonist) and the consumption context (i.e., counterfeits is a crime) to create an overall framework that “covers all bases” in terms of undermining the legitimacy of counterfeit consumption and the moral status of the counterfeit consumer.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This research provides the basis for additional research on materialism, luxury branding, and counterfeit consumption. First, there are opportunities to further explore the moral tenets of “luxury” by examining the relationship between moral identity, materialistic traits, and luxury consumption. In particular, in light of the findings from this research, future studies can examine

the various strategies consumers use when attempting to reconcile their moral identity motives (i.e., “I am a good person”) with the acquisition of material luxury possessions. Some of the luxury brand consumers in this research appear to be using a very direct approach, openly defending how they are “worthy” or “deserving” of luxury. Others appear to use an avoidance strategy by hiding their luxury consumption in situations where showcasing moral identity status is important (e.g., during family occasions). Thus, future research can further examine such strategies in light of moral identity and materialistic traits to further elucidate how, when, and why such different behavioral strategies occur.

Second, in line with the Belk et al. (1989) assertion that the “sacred” is at least in part defined by its opposition to the “profane,” there appear to be interesting avenues for future research that examine the sacred meanings of “authenticity” in the context of luxury brand ownership. As my findings illustrate, the “authenticity” of the genuine brand is often emphasized by luxury brand consumers as they seek to articulate credible arguments to defend their spending on luxury. The genuine is inherently different from the counterfeit because the genuine-item consumer is getting the “authentic” experience (e.g., true intentions of the designer, real materials); thus it appears that the sacredness of the genuine-item is, at least in part, embedded in its perceived authenticity. Future research could further examine the importance of “authentic” meanings to sacred possessions, both in terms of “proof of authenticity” or more experiential aspects, such as getting an authentic retail experience as part of acquiring such possessions.

Third and finally, additional research is needed to fully understand the implications of counterfeits for genuine-item consumers. My findings show that the prevalence of counterfeits may have profound implications for both identity signaling and brand relationships. In particular, genuine-item consumers adjust their brand use to account for the dilution of identity signaling



power of the genuine brand as a consequence of counterfeits. Interestingly, many of the luxury brand consumers studied in this research express frustration with the lack of action from the luxury brand companies with regard to hindering counterfeit production and discouraging counterfeit consumption. Although this may encourage “positive” vigilante behavior, such as evangelizing and confronting, it also appears to encourage distancing from, and even a disdain for, the company that owns the brand (i.e., “we have to do this with or without their support”). Given that the genuine-item consumer is the target customer of the brand, research is needed to understand how the firms that manufacture these luxury brands can mitigate the dilution of identity signaling power and better support the genuine-item consumer.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation explores consumer-brand engagement through a sociological lens. In contrast to previous research that has primarily focused on consumers' use of brands as extensions and expressions of self (Berger and Heath 2007; Berger and Ward 2010; Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005; Levy 1959; Schau and Gilly 2003; Solomon 1983) and as relationship partners (Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998), my research examines how consumers' emic perspectives of brand use are manifested in narrative construction and behaviors. In particular, I show how consumers purposefully engage with brands to realize specific self-relevant goals, such as a desired cultural experience (Essay 1) or the attainment of consumption legitimacy and moral identity (Essay 2).

In Essay 1, I examined how border crossers, as temporary residents of a culture, rely on brands when constructing their desired cultural experiences. For my border crosser informants, brand engagement within the cultural context is inherently dependent on the experiential motives of the consumer. Specifically, I found evidence for three cultural brand engagement manifestations (i.e., planned brand engagement, novel brand exploration, and cultural brand discovery) that differ as a consequence of (1) the border crosser's desired cultural experience, (2) the nature of the border crosser's participation in cultural activities, and (3) the border crosser's assessment and reliance of culturally anchored brand meanings. Thus, cultural brand engagement reflects the sociocultural context in which the brand is encountered (or expectations that it should be encountered there), and the border crosser's desire to use the brand as a prop in the construction of the cultural experience.

Moreover, a focal contribution of Essay 1 is that it furthers our understanding of how consumers rely on brands as instruments to construct their desired experiences. In particular, my findings contribute to extant work on brand meanings and authenticity (Beverland and Farrelly 2010; Grayson and Martinec 2005) by documenting how consumers actively assess the instrumental value of a given brand based on its semiotic “real world” cultural anchoring (i.e., indexical vs. iconic cultural brand cues). Notably, the same brand may serve different symbolic and experiential roles to border crossers with different experiential motives and, consequently, even mass-marketed global and local American brands are deemed “authentic” if they enable the border crosser to realize a desired cultural experience.

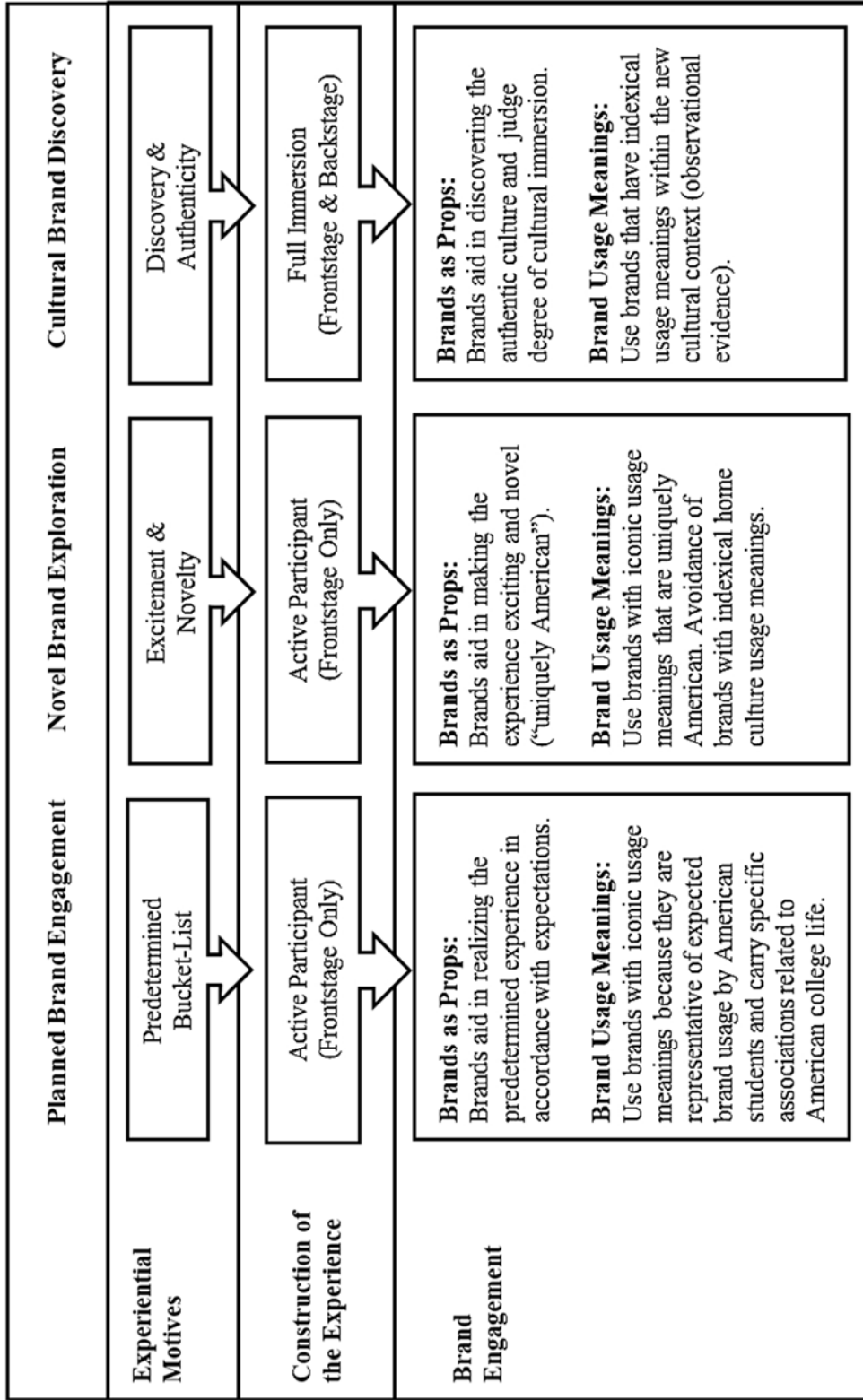
In Essay 2, I explored narratives of luxury brand consumers who have experienced loss of moral status due to the normalization of counterfeit consumption. This essay contributes to work on consumer-brand engagement by highlighting how consumers imbue their brand interactions with moral meaning to attain legitimacy. In the case of the luxury brand consumer, the moral threat is primarily grounded in the negative moral identity signals of luxury brands (e.g., narcissism, status exhibition, wasteful spending) and the increasing availability of an affordable alternative consumption form in the market, counterfeit consumption. Interestingly, it is the juxtaposition between the “sacred” genuine and the “profane” counterfeit that serves as a catalyst for movement mobilization by the luxury brand consumers studied in my research. In this regard, counterfeits appear to be a blessing in disguise because although they may aggravate the threat of stigmatization, they also provide the scapegoat needed to more effectively legitimate luxury brand consumption.

Furthermore, an important contribution of Essay 2 is that it captures collective manifestations of consumer-brand engagement. In particular, I show that luxury brand

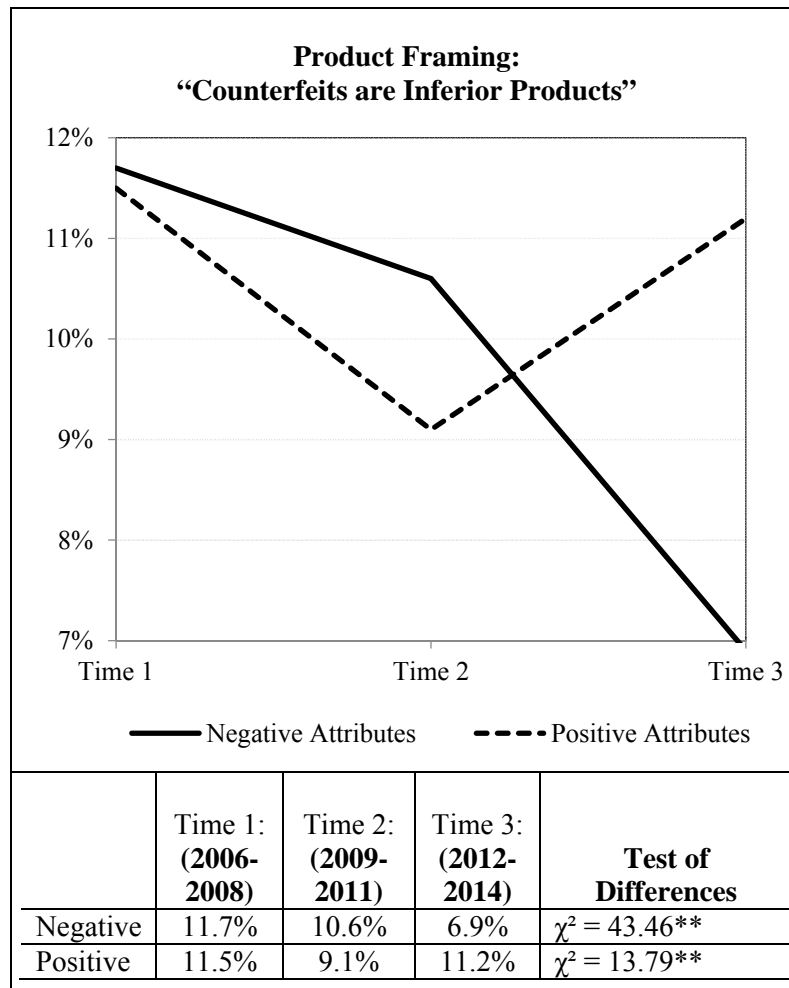
consumers engage in collective moral framing of the counterfeit product and the counterfeit consumer. This collective mobilization strategy appears to be particularly effective to arm the luxury brand consumers with both “credible” arguments and a set of suitable behavioral actions (i.e., evangelizing, confronting, and lecturing) that serve to undermine the moral status of the counterfeit consumer.

Taken together, both dissertation essays reflect the motivational, behavioral, and context-dependent nature of consumer-brand brand engagement (Hollebeek 2011a, 2011b, van Doorn et al. 2010). In particular, both essays support that consumers rely on brands to realize self-relevant goals and, as a consequence, engagement with specific brands is inherently context-dependent. In Essay 1, because the experiential motives of the border crosser are grounded in a specific cultural context, a brand’s perceived instrumentality to the experience construction is inherently dependent on the brand’s culturally anchored brand meanings. This, in turn, results in different behavioral manifestations that reflect the border crosser’s specific desired experience. Similarly, Essay 2 reflects how two contextual factors, stigmatization of luxury consumption, and the prevalence of counterfeits anchor how the luxury brand consumer define what is “moral” about their own consumption practices. Overall, this dissertation contributes to research on consumer-brand engagement by showcasing how consumers use brands as means to realize their experiential and moral motives.

Figure 1: Cultural Brand Engagement Manifestations for Border Crossers (Essay 1)



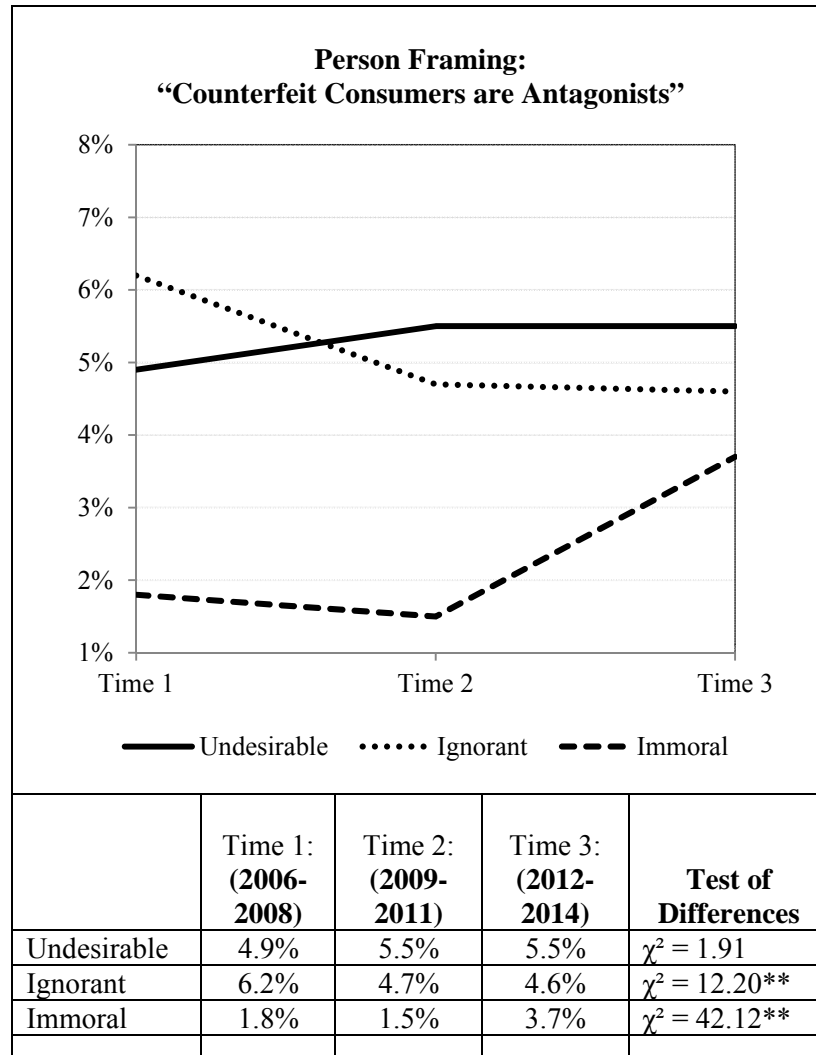
**Figure 2: Frame Content Evolvment - Product Framing (Essay 2)**



\*  $p < .05$  (df = 2, n = 10489)

\*\*  $p < .01$  (df = 2, n = 10489)

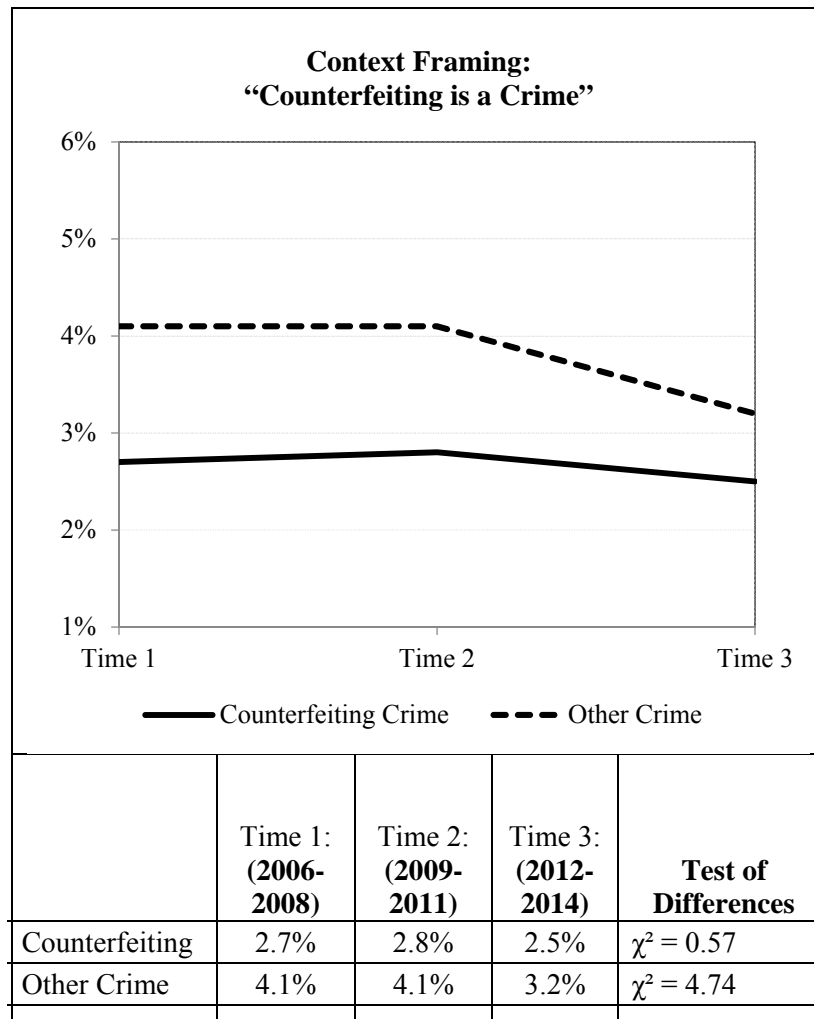
**Figure 3: Frame Content Evolvment - Person Framing (Essay 2)**



\*  $p < .05$  (df = 2, n = 10489)

\*\*  $p < .01$  (df = 2, n = 10489)

**Figure 4: Frame Content Evolvment - Context Framing (Essay 2)**

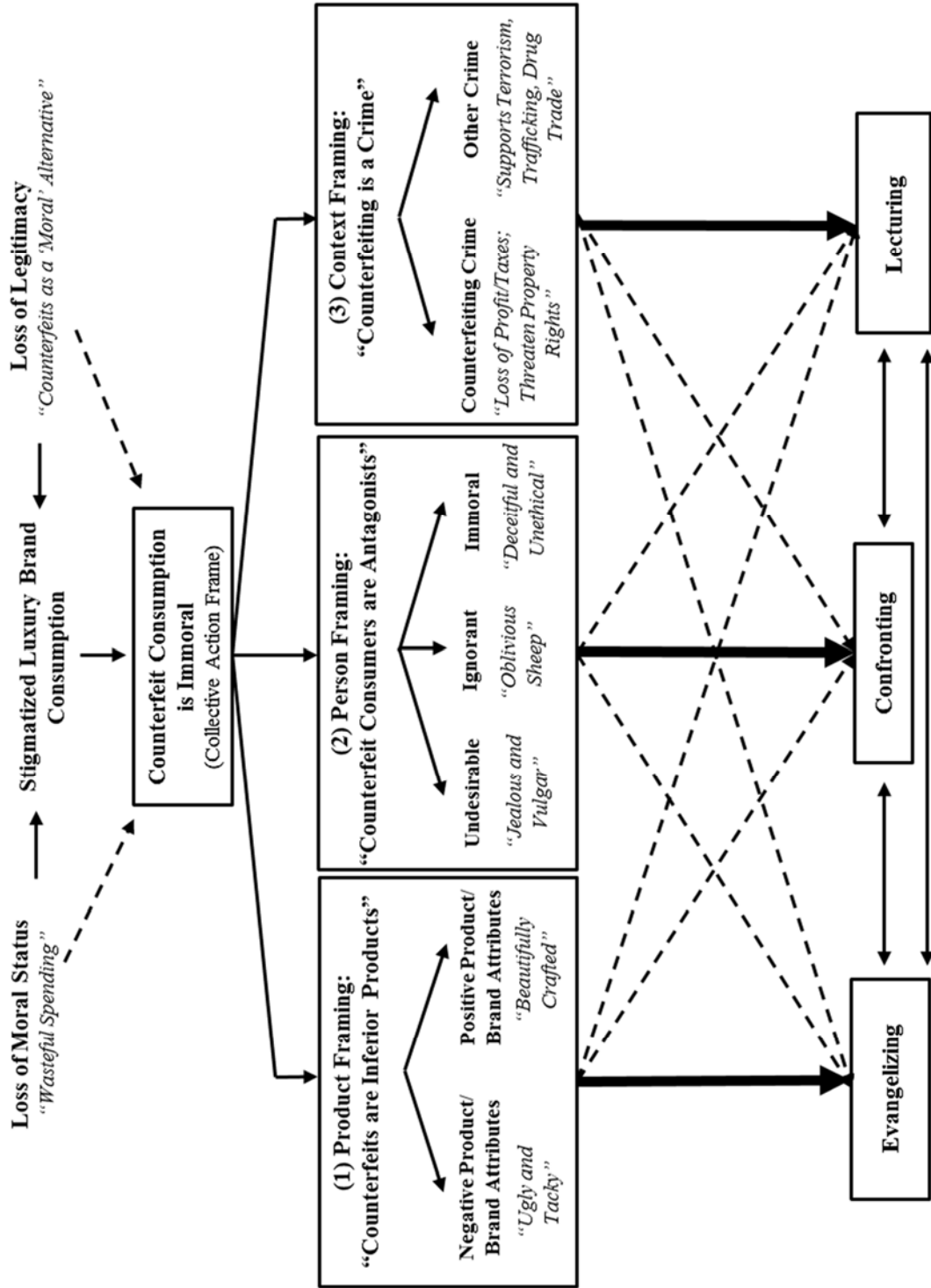


\*  $p < .05$  (df = 2, n = 10489)

\*\*  $p < .01$  (df = 2, n = 10489)



Figure 5: Collective Moral Framing of Counterfeit Consumption (Essay 2)



**Table 1: Informant Profiles (Essay 1)**

Informant (Pseudonym)	Home Country	Age	Stay in U.S. Before First Interview	Expected Stay Length in the U.S.	Cultural Brand Engagement Manifestation*	References to Specific Brands
Sue	China	28	3 years	5 years	NBE	Taco Bell; Calvin Klein; Ann Taylor
Kelly	China	27	2 years	5 years	NBE	A&F; Burt's Bees; Banana Republic
Tina	China	27	1.5 years	2.5 year	CBD	Dunkin Donut's; Apple; Toyota
Stephanie	France	21	3 months	8 months	CBD	North Face; UGG; Urban Outfitters
Elise	France	21	3 months	8 months	PBE	Solo; Urban Outfitters; Ralph Lauren
Aarti	India	28	3 months	8 months	Unengaged	N/A
Adriana	Iran	28	3 years	4 year	NBE	Gap; Nike; Macy's
Jasmine	Iran	30	6 months	2.5 years	NBE	Walmart; JC Penney; Forever 21
Amira	Iran	28	3 months	4.5 years	Unengaged	N/A
Mary	Ireland	22	3 months	8 months	PBE	Victoria's Secret; Lucky Charms; A&F
Jess	Taiwan	25	1 year	2 years	PBE	A&F; Victoria's Secret; Burt's Bees
Susie	Taiwan	28	3 months	2.5 years	NBE	A&F; H&M; Cover Girl
Julie	Turkey	26	1.5 years	5.5 years	NBE	Gap; DKNY; Guess
Elisabeth	United Kingdom	20	3 months	8 months	NBE	American Eagle; Forever 21; H&M
Catherine	United Kingdom	21	3 months	8 months	CBD	Lucky Charms; North Face; H&M
Sarah	United Kingdom	20	3 months	8 months	PBE	Solo; Walmart; Lucky Charms

\* PBE (Planned Brand Engagement); NBE (Novel Brand Exploration); CBD (Cultural Brand Discovery)

**Table 2: Overview of Custom Dictionary (Essay 2)**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Examples of Words Included</b>	<b># Words in Category</b>
<b>Product/Brand Attributes:</b>		
Negative Attributes	plastic, chemical, odor, misaligned	42
Positive Attributes	craftsmanship, hand-crafted, exquisite	44
<b>Personal (User) Characteristics:</b>		
Undesirable Characteristics	rude, shallow, jealous, vulgar	25
Ignorant Characteristics	ignorant, sheep, oblivious, sucker	26
Immoral Characteristics	liar, devious, unsavory, sinful	14
<b>Context (Crime):</b>		
Counterfeiting Crime	counterfeiting, infringement, trademark	9
Other Crime	terrorism, trafficking, prostitution, drug-trade	13

**Table 3: Content Analysis Results (Essay 2)**

	<b>By Post*</b> (n = 10489)	<b>By Poster**</b> (n = 4378)
<b>(1) Product Framing:</b>		
<b>Product/Brand Attributes (All)</b>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>31.4%</b>
Negative Attributes Only	8.2%	12.3%
Positive Attributes Only	8.8%	12.5%
Both Negative and Positive Attributes	1.8%	6.6%
<b>(2) Person Framing:</b>		
<b>Personal Characteristics (All)</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>20.1%</b>
Undesirable Characteristics Only	4.5%	7.2%
Ignorant Characteristics Only	4.5%	6.7%
Immoral Characteristics Only	1.6%	2.1%
Both Undesirable and Ignorant	0.4%	2.0%
Both Undesirable and Immoral	0.3%	0.7%
Both Ignorant and Immoral	0.2%	0.7%
Both Undesirable, Ignorant, and Immoral	0.2%	0.7%
<b>(3) Context Framing:</b>		
<b>Crime (All)</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
Counterfeiting Crime Only	1.8%	2.5%
Other Crime Only	3.0%	4.8%
Both Counterfeiting Crime and Other Crime	0.8%	2.0%

\* Percentage of posts that mention construct related word.

\*\* Percentage of posters that mention construct related word.

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